



# Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



MONDAY — 9 JAN 2023

	International	National	Regional and Local
<b>Events, Opportunities</b> <a href="#">Go to articles</a>	<a href="#">01/09 Day 320 of the Russia invasion</a> <a href="#">01/09 Russia fails to cripple Ukraine capital</a> <a href="#">01/09 Philippine defense chief quits in shakeup</a> <a href="#">01/09 Taiwan seeks to bolster military readiness</a> <a href="#">01/08 Day 319 of the Russia invasion</a> <a href="#">01/08 Ukraine bolsters defenses in east</a> <a href="#">01/08 Ukraine sees 2023 as 'year of victory'</a> <a href="#">01/08 Russia, Belarus extend military drills</a> <a href="#">01/08 New Western firepower outguns Russia</a> <a href="#">01/08 Volunteers seek revenge against Russia</a> <a href="#">01/08 Russia claims hundreds of Ukrainians killed</a> <a href="#">01/08 Marches in Europe support Iran protests</a> <a href="#">01/08 China holds large-scale joint strike drills</a> <a href="#">01/08 Anxiety: China lifts Covid border controls</a> <a href="#">01/08 Local official: 90% China province w/Covid</a> <a href="#">01/08 Iran hardliners turn anger on France</a> <a href="#">01/08 Sweden: can't meet Turkey demands</a> <a href="#">01/08 Social media aided mayhem in Brazil</a> <a href="#">01/08 Governments condemn Brazil protests</a> <a href="#">01/08 Brazil police arrest 300 capitol protesters</a> <a href="#">01/08 Brazil ex-president supporter's capitol riot</a> <a href="#">01/08 Rebel army fighting Myanmar's brutal junta</a> <a href="#">01/07 Day 318 of the Russia invasion</a> <a href="#">01/07 Putin thanks Russian Orthodox Church</a> <a href="#">01/07 Fighting rages in Ukraine in Russia 'truce'</a> <a href="#">01/07 Iran executes 2 anti-government protesters</a> <a href="#">01/07 Global food prices hit record high in 2022</a> <a href="#">01/07 Aging Asia: 'retirement' means more work</a>	<a href="#">01/08 XBB.1.5 variant fuel new Covid wave?</a> <a href="#">01/08 Public schools losing students</a> <a href="#">01/08 New border strategy crackdown</a> <a href="#">01/08 Migrant camps cleared ahead visit</a> <a href="#">01/08 Biden's first visit to southern border</a> <a href="#">01/08 Amid torrential rains, Calif. drought over?</a> <a href="#">01/08 California braces for more rough weather</a> <a href="#">01/07 Tech layoffs, job search competition</a> <a href="#">01/07 FEMA: escalating range of disasters</a> <a href="#">01/07 UNHCR decries US border measures</a> <a href="#">01/07 Florida: migrant surge state of emergency</a> <a href="#">01/07 Jackson, Mississippi: another water crisis</a> <a href="#">01/06 CDC: Covid, flu continue to cause misery</a> <a href="#">01/06 Census: 2.9M cited Covid for not working</a>	<a href="#">01/08 Jury: Spokane Co. owes ex-deputy \$19M</a> <a href="#">01/07 XBB.1.5 variant in Pacific Northwest</a> <a href="#">01/07 Legislative session starts Monday</a> <a href="#">01/07 WASPC priorities for legislative session</a> <a href="#">01/07 Housing, homeless top priority legislature</a> <a href="#">01/07 Healthcare workers eye new staffing laws</a> <a href="#">01/07 USPS mail delivery issues on Vashon Island</a> <a href="#">01/07 Spokane PD to place more officers on patrol</a> <a href="#">01/06 After Olympia's Jan 6, 2021 confrontation?</a>
<b>Cyber, Tech Awareness</b> <a href="#">Go to articles</a>	<a href="#">01/08 Fake Pokemon NFT game installer</a> <a href="#">01/07 Phishing attacks target Moldova govt.</a> <a href="#">01/06 Air France, KLM customers data breach</a> <a href="#">01/06 Group releases stolen UK schools' data</a> <a href="#">01/06 New Mac malware families linked to China</a> <a href="#">01/06 China halts social media accounts of critics</a>	<a href="#">01/09 FCC spam numbers list of unwanted calls</a> <a href="#">01/08 No extended security updates Windows 7</a> <a href="#">01/06 Cybercrooks exploiting ChatGPT</a> <a href="#">01/06 Texas county EMS ransomware breach</a> <a href="#">01/06 Chick-fil-A investigates reports of breach</a> <a href="#">01/06 Russian hackers targeted nuclear scientists</a>	<a href="#">01/07 Seattle schools sue tech giants over harm</a>
<b>Terrorism, Extremism</b> <a href="#">Go to articles</a>	<a href="#">01/09 Taliban officials: prosecute Prince Harry</a> <a href="#">01/09 Germany garages searched in attack plot</a> <a href="#">01/08 Germany: arrest; chemical attack plot</a> <a href="#">01/08 Invictus Games 'serious security issues'?</a> <a href="#">01/08 TTP chief: open to ceasefire Pakistan govt.</a> <a href="#">01/08 Manchester arena plotters, drug gang links</a> <a href="#">01/07 Taliban project: reconstructing Kabul</a> <a href="#">01/07 Somalia govt, al-Shabab deny peace talks</a> <a href="#">01/07 Somalia claims al-Shabab seek negotiations</a> <a href="#">01/06 AQ plans to fake death of dead leader?</a>	<a href="#">01/08 Woman joined ISIS, seeks re-entry to US</a> <a href="#">01/07 Links: Jan 6 rioters to extremist networks</a> <a href="#">01/07 Las Vegas MGM solar plant in 'terror' attack</a> <a href="#">01/07 NYC machete suspect indicted on terrorism</a> <a href="#">01/06 Border: 12 on terror watchlist nabbed Dec.</a>	
<b>Suspicious, Unusual</b> <a href="#">Go to articles</a>	<a href="#">01/07 Snow 'no show' as Europe feels winter heat</a>	<a href="#">01/07 'Tranq dope': fresh horror to drug zones</a> <a href="#">01/06 Great Salt Lake to disappear in 5yrs?</a>	
<b>Crime, Criminals</b> <a href="#">Go to articles</a>	<a href="#">01/08 Nigeria: gunmen kidnap train passengers</a> <a href="#">01/06 Judge halts extradition El Chapo son to US</a>	<a href="#">01/08 Michigan sheriff: 4 dead in home</a> <a href="#">01/08 North Carolina police: 5 dead in home</a> <a href="#">01/08 How police nabbed Idaho killings suspect</a> <a href="#">01/08 Idaho police took mounting criticism, heat</a> <a href="#">01/07 Frequency of family murder-suicide killings</a> <a href="#">01/07 Questions, murky path in VA shooting</a> <a href="#">01/07 Virginia school shooter is a 6yr-old boy</a> <a href="#">01/07 Shootings in Albuquerque connected?</a> <a href="#">01/07 'Damaging spy' for Cuba released from jail</a> <a href="#">01/07 How suspect in Idaho slayings was found</a> <a href="#">01/06 Retail exec: cried too much on retail theft</a>	<a href="#">01/08 WSU students: suspect arrest stunning</a> <a href="#">01/07 Seattle's pandemic crime fever breaking?</a> <a href="#">01/07 Seattle PD: 2nd road-rage shooting in a week</a> <a href="#">01/06 Cross-country pot trafficking operation</a> <a href="#">01/06 Moonlighting deputy charged in retail theft</a>

## Events, Opportunities

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	01/08 Ukraine bolsters defenses in east
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/zelenskiy-ukraine-holding-two-towns-russians-new-attacks-2023-01-08/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/zelenskiy-ukraine-holding-two-towns-russians-new-attacks-2023-01-08/</a>
GIST	<p>KYIV/KRAMATORSK, Ukraine, Jan 8 (Reuters) - Ukraine is strengthening its forces in the eastern Donbas region and repelling constant attacks on Bakhmut and other towns there by Russian mercenary group Wagner, Ukrainian authorities said on Monday.</p> <p>Reinforcements had been sent to Soledar, a small town near Bakhmut where the situation was particularly difficult, they said.</p> <p>"The enemy again made a desperate attempt to storm the city of Soledar from different directions and threw the most professional units of the Wagnerites into battle," Ukraine's military said in a statement.</p> <p>President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said in nightly video remarks on Sunday that Bakhmut and Soledar were holding on despite widespread destruction after months of attacks.</p> <p>"Our soldiers are repelling constant Russian attempts to advance," he said. In Soledar "things are very difficult".</p> <p>In an evacuee centre in nearby Kramatorsk, Olha, 60, said she had fled Soledar after moving from apartment to apartment as each was destroyed in tank battles.</p> <p>"All of last week we couldn't come outside. Everyone was running around, soldiers with automatic weapons, screaming," said Olha, who gave only her first name.</p> <p>"There isn't one house left intact," she said. "Apartments were burning, breaking in half."</p> <p>Yevgeny Prigozhin, founder of the Wagner mercenary group which has been trying to capture Bakhmut and Soledar at the cost of many lives on both sides, said on Saturday its significance lay in the network of mines there.</p> <p>"It not only (has the ability to hold) a big group of people at a depth of 80-100 metres, but tanks and infantry fighting vehicles can also move about."</p> <p>Military analysts say the strategic military benefit for Moscow would be limited. A U.S. official has said Prigozhin, a powerful ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, is eyeing the salt and gypsum from the mines there.</p> <p>Serhiy Cherevaty, a Ukrainian military spokesman for the eastern region, said he thought it would be possible to stabilise the situation.</p> <p>"There are brutal and bloody battles there - 106 shellings in one day," he said on Ukrainian television.</p> <p>"Our troops in Soledar have been allocated additional forces and means for this purpose and everything is being done to improve the operational situation there."</p> <p>Reuters was not able to independently verify the battlefield reports.</p> <p><b>MARKETPLACE STRIKE</b></p> <p>Further north in the Kharkiv region, a Russian missile strike on a marketplace in the village of Shevchenkove killed a 60-year-old woman and wounded several other people, regional governor Oleh Synehubov said.</p>

Badly injured people lay on the ground and rescue workers sifted through piles of rubble, overturned and burning stalls, and a large crater in video footage from police and Ukraine's presidential office. A police officer carried a girl with blood on her face from the scene.

The perpetrators were "common terrorists" Andriy Yermak, chief of the Ukrainian president's staff, wrote on Telegram.

Zelenskiy made a fresh denunciation of what he called Russia's failure to observe a ceasefire it had declared for Russian Orthodox Christmas on Friday and Saturday.

Ukraine never agreed to the ceasefire, which it called a Russian excuse to reinforce troops. Both sides accused the other of continuing hostilities throughout the period.

"Russians were shelling Kherson with incendiary ammunition immediately after Christmas," he said, referring to the southern city abandoned by Russian forces in November.

"Strikes on Kramatorsk and other cities in Donbas - on civilian targets and at the very time when Moscow was reporting a supposed 'silence' for its army."

On Sunday, Russia said a missile attack on Kramatorsk, northwest of Bakhmut, had killed 600 Ukrainian soldiers, but a Reuters reporter at the scene found no visible signs of casualties.

A Reuters team visited two college dormitories that Moscow said had been temporarily housing Ukrainian personnel and which it had targeted as revenge for a New Year's attack that killed scores of Russian soldiers and caused outcry in Russia.

Neither dormitory appeared to have been directly hit or seriously damaged. There were no obvious signs that soldiers had been living there and no sign of bodies or traces of blood.

Serhiy Cherevatyi, a Ukrainian military spokesperson for the eastern region, described the claim of mass casualties as an attempt by the Russian defence ministry to show it had responded forcefully to Ukraine's recent strikes on Russian soldiers.

"This is an information operation of the Russian defence ministry," Cherevatyi told Suspilne News.

The Kremlin said on Monday that it was confident its defence ministry was correct when it said that 600 Ukrainian servicemen had been "destroyed" in the attack.

As Moscow's invasion of Ukraine grinds towards the one-year mark, Russia's military is under domestic pressure to deliver battlefield successes.

Hawkish voices have sought an escalation of the war effort after setbacks such as loss of captured territory and high rates of death and injury. Some pro-Kremlin military bloggers criticised the Russian defence ministry claims.

"Let's talk about 'fraud'," wrote one prominent pro-war military blogger on the Telegram messaging app, who posts under the name of Military Informant and who has more than half a million subscribers.

"It is not clear to us who, and for what reason, decided that 600 Ukrainian soldiers died inside, all at once, if the building was not actually hit (even the light remained on).

The militaries of both Russia and Ukraine have often overstated enemy losses, while minimising their own.

	Ukraine's top military officials said last week some 760 Russian troops had been killed or wounded in two attacks on Moscow-controlled parts of the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions. These reports could not be independently verified.
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 Jury: Spokane Co. owes ex-deputy \$19M</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/northwest/jury-says-spokane-county-owes-ex-deputy-nearly-20m-how-can-it-pay/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/northwest/jury-says-spokane-county-owes-ex-deputy-nearly-20m-how-can-it-pay/</a>
GIST	<p>Steve Bartel has seen a lot of jury verdicts in his two decades as Spokane County's risk management director.</p> <p>But in the past 20 years, he's never seen a verdict like the one delivered against the county last month.</p> <p>"An almost \$20 million verdict? I don't even have the words for it," Bartel said.</p> <p>In December, a Superior Court jury awarded more than \$19 million in lost wages and damages to former Spokane County Sheriff's Sgt. Jeff Thurman and his wife. Thurman sued Sheriff Ozzie Knezovich in 2019 for wrongful termination and defamation. Spokane County plans to appeal.</p> <p>The size of the verdict was shocking, Bartel said, as he anticipated the county might have to pay \$6 million under the worst-case scenario.</p> <p>But the Thurman verdict wasn't the only settlement or jury decision in 2022 that had big financial repercussions for local governments.</p> <p>In March, the county reached a \$1 million settlement with the family of Ethan Murray, who was shot and killed three years earlier by a sheriff's deputy. The city of Spokane in September reached a \$4 million settlement with the family of David Novak, who was shot and killed by police in 2019. Last week, the county agreed to a \$7.5 million settlement with the family of Benjamin Grosser, whose family argued a sheriff's deputy's inaction led to his death in a murder-suicide.</p> <p>A U.S. District Court jury in July awarded \$27 million in damages to the family of Cindy Lou Hill, who died of a ruptured intestine in the Spokane County Jail. Spokane County will pay \$275,000 of that amount while NaphCare, the jail's medical provider, will owe the rest. NaphCare is trying to persuade U.S. District Court Judge Mary Dimke to overturn the verdict.</p> <p>Seven-figure settlements and verdicts aren't normal.</p> <p>"I've never seen these kinds of awards," Bartel said.</p> <p>Local governments rarely pay the full cost when they lose trials or reach massive settlements. Insurance typically covers most of their expenses.</p> <p>Spokane County's main safety net is the Washington Counties Risk Pool, which provides insurance to 25 jurisdictions throughout the state. Counties make annual payments to the pool in return for coverage.</p> <p>The risk pool covers up to \$20 million for each trial loss and settlement, although Spokane County has to pay a \$500,000 deductible per incident. That means if the true cost of the Thurman verdict were \$20 million, the risk pool would cover \$19.5 million.</p> <p>The true cost likely will be far higher, though, if the county's appeal fails.</p> <p>Bartel explained that the county will probably have to pay Thurman's attorney fees. That, combined with the county's own legal expenses, probably will bring the total dollar amount into the \$26 million range. Spokane County will have to make up the \$6 million difference.</p>

It isn't clear how the county will come up with the money. Legally, the county is allowed to assess a tax in order to raise the funds, although Bartel said that's never happened.

County Commissioners Mary Kuney, Al French, Josh Kerns and Amber Waldref could not be reached for comment. Commissioner Chris Jordan, who took office Jan. 1, said he wasn't sure where the \$6 million could come from. Spokane County spokesperson Jared Webley said the commissioners probably won't discuss the \$6 million until after the appeals process is complete.

The case arose after Knezovich fired Thurman in 2019. In a news conference, the sheriff said he made the decision after an internal affairs investigation found Thurman used a racial slur while on the phone with other deputies, talked about killing Black people and sexually harassed a female deputy. Thurman sued Knezovich later that year.

In his lawsuit, the 18-year veteran of the Sheriff's Office challenged Knezovich's characterizations of the investigation, said the story of his use of a racial epithet was fabricated by his accuser and argued he was the victim of racial discrimination himself in his dismissal.

Even when insurance covers the bulk of a big settlement or verdict, legal losses still cost local governments. They raise premiums, the annual payments that organizations make to insurance providers.

The Washington Counties Risk Pool primarily calculates premiums based on a government's prior legal history.

Spokane County's annual payments have risen sharply in the past few years.

Two years ago, Spokane County paid \$2.2 million a year to participate in the risk pool. This year, the county is paying \$3.6 million.

Bartel stressed that Spokane County's legal record isn't necessarily the main driver for those higher premiums. Insurance rates for local governments throughout the state are soaring.

At the same time, the number of companies willing to sell insurance appears to be falling.

"Our concern, big picture, is our ability to buy insurance in the future," Bartel said. "I truly believe that there are several insurance companies out there that will not want to participate in our program — the risk pool program — because they just can't afford to do business in Washington."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/07 Healthcare workers eye new staffing laws
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/washington-healthcare-workers-push-new-staffing-laws/281-ce6f7b88-478e-4a3b-ae1f-430e2c88fa4b">https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/washington-healthcare-workers-push-new-staffing-laws/281-ce6f7b88-478e-4a3b-ae1f-430e2c88fa4b</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — A coalition of state healthcare workers is again urging legislators to pass staffing standards that would set new limits on patient loads and increase enforcement of current laws.</p> <p>The "<a href="#">WA Safe + Healthy</a>" coalition is also asking to move rule-making to the Department of Labor and Industries and calls for more enforcement of existing overtime, meal and rest break laws.</p> <p>"The state of healthcare staffing is worse today than it was a year ago," Service Industries International Union (SEIU) Healthcare 1199NW President Jane Hopkins said in a news conference. "It is important for Washingtonians to understand that while many aspects of our lives have returned to normal, the lives and working conditions of healthcare workers have not."</p> <p>Nurse Dana Robison tells KING 5 she has worked in labor and delivery for 15 years and as a nurse for 17. She said staffing has always been a problem, but over the years has become a growing crisis.</p>

"The reason even now that I keep coming back every day is pretty much only now for my patients," Robison said. "I really just love being able to be with people through some of their hardest moments and also some of their biggest successes and their biggest moments of life, give them someone to lean on, make it less scary and make it something they can do successfully, and that's the main reason I love my job- and keep coming back every day."

She said she has watched as other nurses and healthcare workers have been pushed to their breaking points -- and adds those still working in many cases are past that point -- due to high workloads that she believes endanger staff and patient care.

"This unsafe staffing crisis that we're in is a direct result of years upon years of inaction on a problem that we've known exists and has led to unmanageable, untenable working conditions," Robison said.

While she and many other supporters of the WA Safe + Healthy campaign support workforce development measures, Robison said she believes educating more nurses is not enough, noting nurses who are still licensed but are not currently employed in healthcare roles.

"The worse your staffing is, the more people will reach their breaking point and leave," Robison said.

Meanwhile, the Washington State Hospital Association (WSHA) released its own priorities for legislation this session, including "establishing a statewide staffing innovation collaborative, strengthening Washington's model nurse staffing committee law, creating a hospital-based nurse student loan repayment assistance program, joining the nurse licensure compact, increasing traveler agency transparency and increasing in workforce development."

WA Safe + Healthy expects safe staffing legislation to be filed Monday.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/08 Brazil ex-president supporters capitol riot
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/08/world/americas/brazil-election-protests-bolsonaro.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/08/world/americas/brazil-election-protests-bolsonaro.html</a>
GIST	<p>Thousands of supporters of Brazil's ousted former president, Jair Bolsonaro, stormed Brazil's Congress, Supreme Court and presidential offices on Sunday to protest what they falsely claim was a stolen election, the violent culmination of years of conspiracy theories advanced by Mr. Bolsonaro and his right-wing allies.</p> <p>In scenes reminiscent of the Jan. 6 storming of the United States Capitol, protesters in Brasília, Brazil's capital, draped in the yellow and green of Brazil's flag surged into the seat of power, setting fires, repurposing barricades as weapons, knocking police officers from horseback and filming their crimes as they committed them.</p> <p>"We always said we would not give up," one protester declared as he filmed himself among hundreds of protesters pushing into the Capitol building. "Congress is ours. We are in power."</p> <p>For months, protesters had been demanding that the military prevent the newly elected president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, from taking office on Jan. 1. Many on the right in Brazil have become convinced, despite the lack of evidence, that October's election was rigged.</p> <p>For years, Mr. Bolsonaro had asserted, without any proof, that Brazil's election systems were <a href="#">rife with fraud</a> and that the nation's elites were conspiring to remove him from power.</p> <p>Mr. Lula said Sunday that those false claims had fueled the attack on the plaza, known as Three Powers Square because of the presence of the three branches of government. Mr. Bolsonaro "triggered this," he said in an address to the nation. "He spurred attacks on the three powers whenever he could. This is also his responsibility."</p>



Late Sunday, Mr. Bolsonaro criticized the protests, [saying on Twitter](#) that peaceful demonstrations are part of democracy, but that “destruction and invasions of public buildings, like what occurred today,” are not. But he also rejected Mr. Lula’s accusations, saying they were “without proof.”

At his inauguration, Mr. Lula said that uniting Brazil, Latin America’s largest country and one of the world’s biggest democracies, would be a central goal of his administration. The invasion of the capital suggests that the nation’s divisions are more profound than many had imagined, and it saddles the new president with a major challenge just one week into his administration.

After Mr. Lula was inaugurated, protesters put out calls online for others to join them for a massive demonstration on Sunday. It quickly turned violent.

Hundreds of protesters ascended a ramp to the roof of the congressional building in Brasília, the capital, while a smaller group invaded the building from a lower level, according to witnesses and videos of the scene posted on social media. Other groups of protesters splintered off and broke into the presidential offices and the Supreme Court, which are in the same plaza.

The scene was chaotic.

Protesters streamed into the government buildings, which were largely empty on a Sunday, breaking windows, overturning furniture and looting items inside, according to videos they posted online.

The crowds shouted that they were taking their country back, and that they would not be stopped. Outnumbered, the police fired what appeared to be rubber bullets, pepper spray and tear-gas canisters, including from two helicopters overhead.

“Police are cowardly trying to expel the people from Congress, but there is no way, because even more are arriving,” said one protester in a video filmed from inside Congress and showing hundreds of protesters on multiple floors. “No one is taking our country, damn it.”

Eventually Brazilian Army soldiers helped retake control of some buildings.

Mr. Lula, who was not in Brasília during the invasion, issued an emergency decree until Jan. 31 that allows the federal government to take “any measures necessary” to restore order in the capital. “There is no precedent for what these people have done, and for that, these people must be punished,” he said.

The president, who arrived in the capital late in the day to inspect the damage, said that his government would also investigate anyone who may have financed the protests.

Mr. Bolsonaro appeared to be in Florida. He flew to Orlando in the final days of his presidency, in hopes that his absence from the country would help cool off investigations into his activity as president, according to a friend of the president’s who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe private conversations. He planned to stay in Florida for one to three months, this person said.

Mr. Bolsonaro has never unequivocally conceded defeat in the election, leaving it to his aides to handle the transition of power and skipping the inauguration, where he was supposed to pass the presidential sash to Mr. Lula, an important symbol of the transition of power for a country that lived under a 21-year military dictatorship until 1985.

After the election, he said he supported peaceful protests inspired by “feelings of injustice in the electoral process.”

But before departing for Florida, Mr. Bolsonaro suggested to his supporters that they move on. “We live in a democracy or we don’t,” he said in a recorded statement. “No one wants an adventure.”

His calls were ignored.

The next day, thousands of his supporters remained camped outside the Army headquarters in Brasília, with many convinced that the military and Mr. Bolsonaro were about to execute a secret plan to prevent Mr. Lula's inauguration.

"The army will step in," Magno Rodrigues, 60, a former mechanic and janitor, said in an interview on Dec. 31, the day before Mr. Lula took office. He had been camped outside the army's headquarters for nine weeks and said he was prepared to stay "for the rest of my life if I have to."

One of Mr. Lula's central challenges as president will be to unify the nation after a bitter election in which some of his supporters framed Mr. Bolsonaro as genocidal and cannibalistic, while Mr. Bolsonaro repeatedly called Mr. Lula a criminal. (Mr. Lula served 19 months in prison on corruption charges that were later thrown out.)

Surveys have shown that a sizable chunk of the population say they believe Mr. Lula stole the election, fueled by false claims that have spread across the internet and a shift among many right-wing voters away from traditional sources of news — problems that have also plagued American politics in recent years.

President Biden, who was visiting the southern U.S. border, called the protests "outrageous," and Jake Sullivan, his national security adviser, said the United States "condemns any effort to undermine democracy in Brazil."

"Our support for Brazil's democratic institutions is unwavering," Mr. Sullivan wrote on Twitter. "Brazil's democracy will not be shaken by violence."

Some far-right provocateurs in the United States however, cheered on the attacks, posting videos of the riots and calling the protesters "patriots" who were trying to uphold the Brazilian Constitution. Steve Bannon, a former adviser to President Donald J. Trump, called the protesters "Brazilian Freedom Fighters" in a social-media post. Mr. Bannon has had close ties with one of Mr. Bolsonaro's sons.

At first, the rioters had a relatively easy time breaching the buildings. State police officers tried to hold them back, but they were far outnumbered. The demonstrations had been advertised widely on social media for days.

"It was scary, it was insanity," said Adriana Reis, 30, a cleaner at Congress who witnessed the scene. "They tried hard, with pepper spray, to drive them off, but I don't think the police could handle them all." After protesters streamed in, "we ran away to hide," she said.

Videos from inside Congress, the Supreme Court and the presidential offices quickly filled social-media feeds and group chats, showing protesters wearing their national flag and trudging through the halls of power, not exactly sure what to do next.

They sat in the padded chairs of the Chamber of Deputies, rifled through paperwork in the presidential offices and posed with a golden coat of arms that appeared to be ripped from the wall of the Supreme Court's chambers. Federal officials later distributed images and videos from the presidential offices that showed destroyed computers, art ripped from frames and firearm cases that had been emptied of their guns.

The protesters were ransacking buildings that have been hailed as [gems of Modernist architecture](#). Designed by the celebrated Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer in the 1950s, the Supreme Court, for instance, features columns of concrete clad in white marble that [echo the fluttering of a sheet in the wind](#). And Congress is known for being capped with both a dome, under which the Senate is located, and a sort of bowl, under which the House is located.



Outside the presidential offices, they raised the flag of the Brazilian Empire, a period in the 19th century before Brazil became a democracy, and they sang Brazil's national anthem. Videos of the rampage showed many protesters with phones aloft, filming the scene.

"There is no way to stop the people," one protester declared as he live-streamed hundreds of protesters charging onto the roof of Congress. "Subscribe to my channel, guys."

Several news outlets said their journalists were attacked and robbed during the rioting. And Ricardo Stuckert, Mr. Lula's official photographer, had his passport and more than \$95,000 worth of equipment stolen from a room in the presidential offices, according to his wife, Cristina Lino.

By late afternoon, military trucks had arrived.

Armed soldiers entered the presidential offices through a back door to ambush rioters inside. Shortly after, protesters began to stream out of the building, including some escorted by law enforcement officers.

By 9 p.m., more than seven hours after the invasions began, Brazil's justice minister, Flávio Dino, said the buildings had been cleared. He said officials had arrested at least 200 people. The governor of Brasília said the number of arrests had exceeded 400.

Valdemar Costa Neto, the head of Mr. Bolsonaro's right-wing Liberal Party, criticized the protesters.

"Today is a sad day for the Brazilian nation," he said in a statement. "All orderly demonstrations are legitimate. Disorder has never been part of our nation's principles."

The Brazilian flag draped around many of the rioters on Sunday includes three words: "Order and progress."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/08 Biden's first visit to southern border
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/08/us/politics/biden-southern-border-immigration.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/08/us/politics/biden-southern-border-immigration.html</a>
GIST	<p>EL PASO — President Biden on Sunday made his first visit to the border since taking office, arriving at a city swamped by migrants amid a historic surge in illegal immigration and anger from both parties about how he is handling it.</p> <p>In a brief visit to El Paso's busiest crossing and a migrant services support center, Mr. Biden acceded to demands by Republicans that he make the trip he had not taken for two years.</p> <p>But as he arrived in El Paso, he found himself under siege from all sides.</p> <p>Democrats and human rights activists condemned his <a href="#">new enforcement plan</a> as a "humanitarian disgrace." Republicans blasted his delay in coming to a border they say is "wide open" to illegal immigration. And Mexican officials — who are preparing to welcome him to a summit of North American leaders on Monday — warned that his proposals would cross a "red line" for them.</p> <p>The number of migrants apprehended trying to illegally cross the 2,000-mile border with Mexico has hit record highs. In the 12 months leading up to last October, the Border Patrol <a href="#">encountered 1.7 million migrants trying to cross illegally</a>, the highest number since 1960. Officials said overall crossings had dipped some during the holiday season in December, but they said they expected the numbers to rise again quickly in the coming months.</p> <p>The surge in migrants has reached deep into the United States. Cities as far away as New York and Washington are struggling to provide services to the growing numbers who are arriving, some at the behest of Republican governors in Florida and Texas, who have bused or flown the migrants out of their states.</p>

In El Paso, a record-breaking swell of migration from across Central and South America has made the city one of the most vivid symbols of the decades-long breakdown in America's immigration system. Desperate people, often with small children, spend cold nights on park benches, with no legal status and nowhere to go after making the brutally dangerous trek north in the hopes of finding refuge.

The question of what to do with them — Accept them? Detain them? Send them home? — has become one of the most polarized political debates in the United States. And Mr. Biden has not found a solution as the situation in El Paso and communities along the border has worsened during his presidency.

On Sunday, Mr. Biden met with Border Patrol officers, members of Congress and local officials at the Bridge of the Americas Port of Entry, El Paso's busiest crossing, which is set to receive \$600 million from the president's infrastructure law. He also made an unannounced stop along the 18-foot border wall that separates El Paso from Juárez, Mexico, talking to Border Patrol agents as he strolled along a dirt road on the American side.

Asked later what he learned, Mr. Biden said: "They need a lot of resources. We're going to get it for them," apparently referring to the Border Patrol agents he just met with.

Mr. Biden also toured the El Paso County Migrant Services Center and talked to local business owners.

Mr. Biden did not visit areas where migrants have been sleeping outdoors in El Paso. Hours before he landed, streets were relatively quiet. But the mood was tense mere steps from the Bridge of the Americas in El Segundo Barrio, which has become the epicenter of the migrant crisis in the city.

By Sunday, a group of men had turned the small gap behind a fence of Sacred Heart Church into rudimentary accommodations. They turned a pile of sheets, some of them donated by the Red Cross, into beds, next to worn-out Bibles they carried from home. John Cardenas, a native of Venezuela who arrived in El Paso on Dec. 31, prefers to sleep next to a large statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

"I feel like she protects me, so I sleep right here next to her," Mr. Cardenas said, his eyes scanning the image next to him. But on Sunday he was praying for a different kind of protection. "I hope Biden can offer us some help, too. We need it desperately."

Jesús Ramirez, 19, another Venezuelan who traveled with Mr. Cardenas from Panama, also arrived on Dec. 31. He said he does not regret the risks he took during a grueling three-month trek to the U.S. border. He saw people die along the way, even children, he said, closing his eyes. He still has nightmares about the dead bodies he saw in the Darién Gap, a dangerous and roadless land bridge that connects Colombia and Panama.

On the Mexican side on Sunday afternoon, fewer than a dozen migrants, the majority from Venezuela, appeared defeated, staring across the Rio Grande, where they were welcomed by a newly installed fence, barbed wire and a row of heavily armed Texas National Guard members.

Denyerlin Chirino, 24, stood next to her 3-year-old, Chantal, and a group of fellow travelers. Ms. Chirino surrendered at a port of entry on Dec. 23, she said, but was quickly expelled. She had been trying to reach family in Orlando.

"I came here today because I heard the U.S. president is visiting the border," she said, adding, "I'm hoping against hope that he does something for us."

Moments after Ms. Chirino had spoken with The New York Times, a caravan of Mexican state police vehicles raced across the river and stepped on their brakes when they spotted the group of migrants. Ms. Chirino grabbed her daughter and took off running.

Responding to mounting criticism of his handling of the border, Mr. Biden on Thursday announced a crackdown on illegal border crossings paired with some new avenues for migrants to immigrate legally. Mr. Biden has leaned on several Trump-era immigration policies, including for a time one that required migrants to wait in squalid camps in Mexico while their asylum applications were processed.

As a candidate, Mr. Biden assailed President Donald J. Trump's handling of the border, calling it inhumane and ineffective. But as Mr. Biden heads to Mexico City for two days of meetings that will be dominated by the issue of immigration, his critics have only ramped up their assault on his policies.

"They flout refugee law & will unleash more suffering at the border, w/ disparate harm to Black, Brown & Indigenous asylum seekers," Heidi Altman, the policy director at the National Immigrant Justice Center, a liberal human rights group, said on Twitter.

The criticism from the same groups that fiercely opposed Mr. Trump's policies has infuriated Mr. Biden and his aides, who say the comparison is unfair and wrong.

"Well, obviously, we take a different view," said John F. Kirby, a top spokesman for the National Security Council, noting the demand to balance the need for "legal pathways to entry" and ensuring that "illegal migration is curbed."

The president's aides also braced for renewed attacks from Republicans who have spent months accusing the administration of being too weak on the border. In an opinion article published before the president's trip, Senator Shelley Moore Capito, Republican of West Virginia, chided Mr. Biden for waiting almost two years to visit.

"The president neglecting to visit the southern border — during a time when we are facing record illegal crossings and there is a clear crisis — would be the equivalent of our commander in chief not visiting the Pentagon during a military operation," she wrote.

Republicans have argued that Mr. Biden's desire to be more "humane" along the border was an open invitation to increased migration, and they have assailed what they said was the administration's continued release of many migrants into the United States while their immigration cases are litigated.

Upon arriving in El Paso on Sunday, Mr. Biden was greeted by Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas, who handed him a letter. A news release from the governor's office said that the letter said, "This chaos is the direct result of your failure to enforce the immigration laws that Congress enacted."

The question of what to do along the southern border in places like El Paso will be at the center of the discussions when Mr. Biden arrives for meetings with President Andrés Manuel López Obrador of Mexico and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada.

In an interview before Mr. Biden's departure on Sunday, Mexico's top official for North American relations bluntly rejected a proposal by the Biden administration that would automatically deny asylum to migrants who have traveled through Mexico without seeking refuge in that country first. A version of that idea, known as a "safe third country" policy, was first proposed by Mr. Trump in 2019.

"The safe-third-country idea is a red line for us," said Roberto Velasco, the Mexican Foreign Ministry's chief officer for North America. "It would overwhelm the system."

Finding ways to cooperate with Mexico on migration is a key goal for Mr. Biden on his visit to the country. In his remarks on Thursday, the president announced that Mexico had agreed to accept up to 30,000 migrants each month from Haiti, Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua if they tried to cross into the United States illegally and their asylum claims were rejected.

But longtime observers of the relationship between the two countries said there were limits to what Mexico would accept.

“Mexico cannot guarantee the security of those fleeing violence,” said Ana Lorena Delgadillo, the director of the Foundation for Justice, an organization that supports migrants in Mexico. “Mexicans are fleeing violence in their own communities. How are we going to protect others if we cannot protect our own?”

While the current Mexican administration has pushed hard to stem the stream of migrants traveling across Mexico and into the United States, security experts said the government had done less to stop drugs from flowing north — another planned topic of discussion at the summit this week.

David Shirk, the director of the Justice in Mexico Program at the University of San Diego, said that “what we have seen in the last three years is essentially the Mexican government shrugging its shoulders.”

But on Thursday, the Mexican military detained Ovidio Guzmán López — the son of the infamous drug lord Joaquín Guzmán Loera, known as “El Chapo” — who is believed to be a leader of the Sinaloa drug cartel that his father once headed.

The response from the cartel was swift, and violent, with vehicles lit on fire across the capital city of Culiacán, according to law enforcement officials and videos posted on social media. Videos showed armed groups controlling checkpoints near the city, carrying high-powered machine guns capable of taking down helicopters.

At the summit on Monday and Tuesday, the three leaders are also expected to clash over a sharp rise in the number of formal trade disputes since the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement went into effect in 2020. Several conflicts loom large. The United States and Canada have protested Mexican energy policies that benefit Mexican firms over their companies. Mexico also plans to ban genetically modified corn, to the frustration of the United States. And the other countries have complained about how the United States is interpreting the trade agreement’s rules for making cars, arguing that Washington is favoring American products over their own.

American officials have tried to emphasize the benefits that its neighbors can expect to see from the investments, given that the countries’ economies are so intertwined. The United States, Canada and Mexico trade \$3 million of goods every minute, and they share heavily integrated supply chains, in which parts and raw materials made in one country are often used in the factories of the others.

The trade issue is particularly important for Mr. Trudeau, who has served as Canada’s leader since 2015 but has recently become a more polarizing figure in his country.

“There’s been some discussion, because he’s been in power for quite a while, about who the potential successor might be,” said Andrew McDougall, a political scientist at the University of Toronto. “But there isn’t any obvious candidate right now and, in the medium term, it doesn’t seem like he’s going anywhere.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/08 Governments condemn Brazil protests
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/08/world/americas/brazil-protests-world-leaders.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/08/world/americas/brazil-protests-world-leaders.html</a>
GIST	<p>Governments in Latin America and beyond were swift to condemn the unrest in Brazil’s capital on Sunday.</p> <p>President Biden, who was visiting the southern U.S. border, called the protests “outrageous” while Jake Sullivan, his national security adviser, said the United States “condemns any effort to undermine democracy in Brazil.”</p> <p>“Our support for Brazil’s democratic institutions is unwavering,” Mr. Sullivan <a href="#">wrote on Twitter</a>. “Brazil’s democracy will not be shaken by violence.”</p>

	<p>Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken echoed that sentiment and pledged support for Brazil's president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who took office on Jan. 1. "Using violence to attack democratic institutions is always unacceptable," he said.</p> <p>Latin American leaders also condemned the protests as undemocratic. The leaders of two neighboring nations, Argentina and Uruguay, assailed the demonstrations.</p> <p>President Alberto Fernandez of Argentina <a href="#">wrote on Twitter</a>: "Democracy is the only political system that guarantees freedoms and obliges us to respect the popular verdict." In Uruguay, President Luis Lacalle Pou <a href="#">tweeted</a>: "We regret and condemn the actions carried out in Brazil that threaten democracy and institutions."</p> <p>And Gabriel Boric Font, the president of Chile, <a href="#">vowed</a>: "The Brazilian government has our full support in the face of this cowardly and vile attack on democracy."</p> <p>European leaders also backed Mr. Lula. President Emmanuel Macron of France said that "the will of the Brazilian people and democratic institutions must be respected." Writing on <a href="#">Twitter</a>, Mr. Macron said that Mr. Lula could count on France's "unfailing support."</p> <p>And Pedro Sánchez, the prime minister of Spain, said he supported Mr. Lula, <a href="#">writing on Twitter</a>, "We strongly condemn the assault on the Brazilian Congress and call for an immediate return to democratic normality."</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/09 Local official: 90% China province w/Covid</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/09/life-is-moving-forward-china-enters-new-phase-in-covid-fight-as-borders-open">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/09/life-is-moving-forward-china-enters-new-phase-in-covid-fight-as-borders-open</a>
GIST	<p>Almost 90% of people in China's third most populous province have now been infected with Covid-19, a top local official has said, as the country battles an unprecedented surge in cases.</p> <p>Kan Quancheng, director of the health commission for central Henan province, told a press conference that "as of January 6, 2023, the province's Covid infection rate is 89%".</p> <p>With a population of 99.4 million, the figures suggest about 88.5 million people in Henan may now have been infected.</p> <p>Visits to fever clinics peaked on 19 December, Kan said, "after which it showed a continuous downward trend".</p> <p>The opening of China's borders on Sunday was one of the last steps in the dismantling of the country's zero-Covid regime, which began last month after historic protests and has led to a huge wave of infections.</p> <p>Covid cases are expected to soar further as the country celebrates lunar new year later this month, with millions set to travel from big cities to visit vulnerable older relatives in the countryside.</p> <p>In the first wave of pre-holiday travel, official data showed 34.7 million people travelled domestically on Saturday – up by more than a third compared with last year, according to state media.</p> <p>While Beijing's move to drop quarantine requirements is expected to boost outbound travel, many nations are demanding negative tests from visitors from China, seeking to contain an outbreak that is overwhelming many of China's hospitals and crematoriums.</p> <p>Officially, China reported just 5,272 Covid-related deaths as of 8 January, one of the lowest rates of death from the infection in the world.</p>

But the World Health Organization has said China is under-reporting the scale of the outbreak and international health experts estimate more than 1 million people in the country could die from the disease this year.

China's top health officials and state media have repeatedly said Covid infections are peaking across the country and they are playing down the threat now posed by the disease.

"Life is moving forward again!", the official newspaper of the Communist party, the People's Daily, wrote in an editorial on Sunday praising the government's virus policies, which it said had moved from "preventing infection" to "preventing severe disease".

"Today, the virus is weak, we are stronger."

China's state Xinhua news agency said the country had entered a "new phase" in its Covid response.

Asian shares lifted to a five-month high on Monday as investors bet that China's reopening would help revive the \$17tn economy and bolster the outlook for global growth.

"It's a huge relief just to be able to go back to normal ... just come back to China, get off the plane, get myself a taxi and just go home," Michael Harrold, 61, a copy editor in Beijing, told Reuters at Beijing Capital International Airport on Sunday after he arrived on a flight from Warsaw.

Harrold said he had been anticipating having to quarantine and do several rounds of testing on his return when he left for Europe for a Christmas break in early December.

State broadcaster CCTV reported on Sunday that direct flights from South Korea to China were close to sold out.

However, a spike in demand will be hampered by the limited number of flights to and from China, which are currently at a small fraction of pre-Covid levels.

Korean Air said earlier this month that it was halting a plan to increase flights to China due to Seoul's cautious stance towards Chinese travellers. South Korea, like many other countries, now requires travellers from China, Macau and Hong Kong to provide negative Covid test results before departure.

Flight Master data showed that on Sunday, China had a total of 245 international flights, combining inbound and outbound, compared with 2,546 flights on the same day in 2019, representing a fall of 91%.

China's domestic tourism revenue in 2023 is expected to recover to 70-75% of pre-Covid levels, but the number of inbound and outbound trips is forecast to hit just 30-40% of pre-Covid levels this year, China News reported on Sunday.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 Russia, Belarus extend military drills</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/08/russia-belarus-extend-military-drills-fears-new-push-ukraine">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/08/russia-belarus-extend-military-drills-fears-new-push-ukraine</a>
GIST	<p>Russia and Belarus have expanded their joint military training exercises in Belarus, the country's defence TV channel said on Sunday, as concern grows that Moscow is pressuring its closest ally to join the war in <a href="#">Ukraine</a>.</p> <p>The two countries added weapons, soldiers and specialised equipment to the exercises and were doing drills drawing on Russian experience in Ukraine, Reuters reported.</p> <p>On Friday the Belarusian leader, Alexander Lukashenko, visited a military base where Russian troops are stationed to meet troops and discuss the joint military drills.</p>



Unofficial Telegram channels monitoring military activity in Belarus reported that between 1,400 and 1,600 Russian troops arrived in the city of Vitebsk, in north-east Belarus, on Sunday. Reuters said it could not independently verify the information.

A unilateral [Russian ceasefire](#) – announced for the Orthodox Christmas celebrations – drew to an end on Sunday but there had been little letup in fighting or civilian deaths during the period.

In the final hours when Russia was meant to be holding off fire, at least two people were killed by shelling, one in northern Kharkiv and another in Soledar, eastern Donetsk, Ukrainian officials said.

Moscow claimed without evidence on Sunday that it had killed 600 Ukrainian soldiers in a strike on the eastern town of Kramatorsk, near the frontline in Bakhmut, in revenge for an attack by Ukraine on new year's day that killed hundreds of Russian fighters in the town of Makiivka. Ukraine dismissed the claim as propaganda and reporters for Reuters who visited the scene said there was no obvious sign of casualties.

Overnight temperatures are falling well below freezing across Ukraine, which could pave the way for more intense fighting as it becomes easier to move heavy machinery that would have become bogged down in autumn mud.

Fears of a new military push from the north will increase. Lukashenko has said he will not join the war, but his territory was used as a launchpad for the failed push for Kyiv last year, and Ukrainian authorities say it is still used as a base for drone and missile attacks.

In late December, Vladimir Putin [made a rare visit to the Belarusian capital, Minsk](#). The Russian leader meets regularly with Lukashenko, but usually closer to home.

The trip was the first time Putin had been to Belarus since 2019, and raised fears he was pushing for military help with the war in Ukraine, where Russia's army has suffered a string of humiliating defeats and is locked into grinding trench warfare.

Many in Ukraine and beyond have warned that Putin is considering a second attempt on Kyiv, following the pattern of last year's invasion from the north, although the borders are now much more heavily fortified.

Ukraine's military intelligence has claimed Russia is set to [order the mobilisation](#) of as many as 500,000 conscripts in January in addition to the 300,000 it called up in October, in another apparent sign that Putin has no intention of ending the war.

In December, Ukraine's minister of defence, [Oleksii Reznikov](#), and the army commander, Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, said Russia would attack from Belarus again this coming February, aiming for Kyiv. However, Ukraine's military intelligence said it believed the possibility of an attack from Belarus was low.

Last week a senior Belarus military official said the joint Russian-Belarusian military force was being deployed as a "strategic deterrence", the country's Belta news agency [reported](#).

"[It] is probably supposed to cool off hotheads of the west with its aggressive policy towards the Union State of Belarus and Russia," Belta quoted Aleksandr Volfovich, the state secretary of the security council of Belarus, as saying.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/09 Day 320 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/09/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-320-of-the-invasion">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/09/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-320-of-the-invasion</a>
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Ukrainian forces are repelling constant attacks on Bakhmut in the eastern Donbas region and holding their positions in nearby Soledar in arduous conditions, <a href="#">Volodymyr Zelenskiy</a> has</li></ul>

	<p>said. The Ukrainian president said in his Sunday night video address: “Bakhmut is holding on despite everything. And even though most of the town has been destroyed by Russian strikes, our soldiers are repelling constant Russian attempts to advance. Soledar is holding on, even though there is even greater destruction and things are very difficult.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Russia has claimed to have killed more than 600 Ukrainian troops in a “retaliatory strike”</b> in the eastern town of Kramatorsk, but Ukraine’s armed forces rejected the claim. The mayor of the town, near the frontline city of Bakhmut, said there had been no deaths from strikes over the weekend, while a witness told Reuters on Sunday that buildings had been damaged but not destroyed and there were no obvious signs of casualties. The Russian claim seems <a href="#">suspicious for several reasons</a>.</li> <li>• <b>Zelenskiy denounced what he said was Russia’s failure to observe a 36-hour ceasefire</b> it had declared for Orthodox Christmas by launching attacks on Ukrainian cities.</li> <li>• <b>At least two people were killed during fighting in eastern Ukraine</b>, officials said. Donetsk’s governor, Pavlo Kyrylenko, said one person was killed in strikes on Bakhmut and eight others in the region were wounded, Associated Press reported. Kyrylenko also said rocket attacks on Kramatorsk and Konstantynivka.</li> <li>• <b>Russia and Belarus have expanded their joint military training exercises in Belarus</b>, the country’s defence TV channel said on Sunday, as concern grows that Moscow is <a href="#">pressuring its closest ally to join the war in Ukraine</a>. The two countries added weapons, soldiers and specialised equipment to the exercises, Reuters reported.</li> <li>• <b>One person was killed from the attack on the Starobesheve power plant in Novyi Svit</b>, Russia’s state news agency Tass said on Sunday. The thermal power plant was one of two – in part of Ukraine’s Donetsk region controlled by Russian forces – damaged in a rocket attack by the Ukrainian army, Moscow-installed officials said.</li> <li>• <b>Demands for a special tribunal to investigate Russia for a “crime of aggression” against Ukraine have been backed by senior UK politicians</b> from across the political divide in a move to show Vladimir Putin and his generals that they will be held to account.</li> <li>• The Russian government extended support to a legislative amendment that would <b>classify maps that dispute the country’s official “territorial integrity” as punishable extremist materials</b>, Reuters reported the state-owned Tass news agency as saying on Sunday.</li> <li>• <b>About 50 Ukrainian soldiers who were released from Russian detention on Sunday</b> as part of a prisoner swap posed for a photo on their release.</li> </ul>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 Rebel army fighting Myanmar’s brutal junta</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/08/on-the-frontline-with-the-rebel-army-fighting-myanmars-brutal-junta">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/08/on-the-frontline-with-the-rebel-army-fighting-myanmars-brutal-junta</a>
GIST	<p>With a loaded cartridge holder strapped to her back and a shotgun gripped tightly in her hands, Rose Lalhmanhaih looks far older than her 17 years. Just two years ago, she was studying at school; now she is a rebel soldier on the frontline of Myanmar’s revolutionary war. Only her nails, flecked with a bright purple polish, hint at the girl she once was.</p> <p>Crouching behind sandbags and holding binoculars, Lalhmanhaih scans the dense scrub of the surrounding valley, then speaks decisively into her walkie talkie. “Clear ... clear,” she says. A garrison of the Myanmar military lies only five miles away and an exchange of fire rings out now and then. But for today at least, the soldiers of the brutal junta regime will leave the tiny village of Haimual in Chin state in peace.</p> <p>In February 2021 Myanmar’s military, known as the Tatmadaw, seized power in a coup d’etat, overthrowing the civilian government and imprisoning its leader, <a href="#">Nobel peace prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi</a>. As the Tatmadaw began ruthlessly consolidating power, cracking down on political opponents and killing protesters, an armed insurgency, the People’s Defence Force (PDF), <a href="#">rose up fighting for democracy</a> to be restored. There are about 60,000 PDF soldiers across the country, often fighting alongside other ethnic armies, and they are said to control around half the territory.</p>

The battles being fought across the country by this guerrilla army have been dirty and bloody. Since the coup, more than 2,600 civilians have been killed and 16,500 have been arrested, as junta soldiers have raped and murdered civilians and bombed towns and cities. Protesters, activists and journalists have been tortured.

Zay-Lin-Oo, 32, who was a bomb engineer with the Tatmadaw before he deserted the army and fled to [India](#) last year, tells how he was ordered by senior officers to shoot at unarmed protesters and plant landmines that would kill civilians.

“When we would launch an operation against the rebels, as a trap we would plant bombs but I was ordered not to defuse them until after we had left the site,” he says. “The explosives would go off after we departed, and so many innocent civilians died because of this.”

In Haimual, Lalhmanhaih is the youngest fighter of the Mountain Eagle Defence Force (MEDF), a rebel group that is part of the PDF and consists of about three dozen men and two women from Haimual village.

The battle is deeply personal for this teenager. In August, her best friend and a fellow rebel soldier, 17-year-old Lalnuniuii, and Lalnuniuii’s 14-year-old brother, Lalruatmawia, were taken hostage by junta soldiers.

Lalhmanhaih had been with them during the ambush but was not armed, and could do nothing as her friends were dragged away by soldiers. Screams were heard through the night as the two were tortured. The next afternoon, villagers heard gunshots and saw flames rising from several houses as the junta soldiers finally abandoned the village. They found the bodies of the siblings partially buried in a pit.

A doctor over the border in India who later examined the bodies said Lalruatmawia had torture marks all over his body, while his sister had been raped several times and shot three times in the head at close range, injuries concurrent with widespread accounts of rape and sexual violence by junta soldiers.

“They must have been subjected to a lot of pain,” says their mother, Lalthantluangi, with a shudder. “Her body had bite marks all over. Her genitals were mutilated by those beasts.”

Lalnuniuii believed passionately in fighting the junta and would often post Instagram videos of herself dancing in her rebel uniform. In her diary, one of the last messages reads: “My future is People’s Defence Force ... I will never surrender.”

Lalhmanhaih thinks of her best friend every morning when she wakes up in their makeshift bunker, puts on her uniform and loads her shotgun. “It still haunts me, that moment when she was separated from us,” she says. “I want to liberate my people and country from the barbaric military and take revenge for what they did to my best friend. She is always in my thoughts and it keeps me here defending my place.”

Almost a year ago, on the afternoon of 9 January, word spread in Haimual that government soldiers were on the way to raid the village. Almost all 180 households, mostly farmers and traders, began to flee in panic.

“People could not get any of their belongings, except the clothes we were wearing,” recalls Lalrin Dika, a villager. “We knew the military was going to kill us because the villagers have been against military rule.”

Later that day, smoke could be seen rising from the village as junta soldiers stormed in and burned down many of their houses. With the village only three miles west of the border with India, the villagers all crossed over the Tiau River into the Indian state of Mizoram, joining tens of thousands of Myanmar refugees who have escaped to India since the coup and are living in makeshift camps.

Although the India-Myanmar border is officially closed, the Mizo people of Mizoram share the same ethnic background as the Chin people of Myanmar and there is much sympathy for their plight and a willingness to help. Local authorities and border police have largely turned a blind eye to the waves of

refugees and local people in Mizoram have welcomed them into their communities and schools. According to one local MP, more than 40,000 Myanmar refugees are now living across 60 camps in the Indian state.

“They are our brothers and sisters from the Chin province and that is why we give them food and shelter,” Zoramthanga, the chief minister of Mizoram, told the *Observer*.

But many in the village returned to Haimual to fight, having collected old hunting rifles from supportive people in Mizoram. Their old family homes, which now stand eerie and deserted, are surrounded by outposts manned by this rag-tag army and the silence is punctured only by the fighters on motorbike patrols.

Yet it is more than just their property they are protecting. This tiny village holds strategic importance, not just for the locals but for the entire pro-democracy insurgency of Myanmar. It secures a key supply line from India, through which food, medicine and weapons are smuggled illegally over the border and are keeping the insurgency alive.

One exiled Myanmar politician now living in the Mizoram state capital of Aizawl, who requested anonymity for security reasons, said he was among a group living in India who were strategising for the insurgency and sending weapons to help the rebel fighters.

A commander of the rebel group in Haimual, who goes by the nom de guerre Maria, said they were “completely dependent on the Indian side for everything. If the contact with the Indian side is broken, it will mean a big blow to the defence fighters”. As a precaution, they have laid explosives around the periphery of the village, ready to detonate at any sign of the junta.

The rebels also collect what they call “donations” from truckers carrying goods to and from India. “We take whatever they are willing to give us and most of them are generous,” he says. Most of the fighters in Haimual cross over to Mizoram to visit their families for one night a month.

However, as attention on the anti-junta fight in Myanmar has waned, supplies are beginning to dry up. Rebels have begun making their own guns and explosives with materials such as gelatine but many are fearful about sustaining their resistance in the future.

“We are fighting with these outdated shotguns against an army that has modern automated guns and other sophisticated weapons,” says 63-year-old Sunglingthanhg, the oldest fighter in the group, showing the rusted barrel of his gun.

Fewer than half the rebels have received a month of training on how to fight and only half have rifles. They also complain about the lack of coordination within the rebel groups, which has left them unclear as to how much territory is under PDF control.

In their rare moments of light relief, the rebel fighters play volleyball or card games and some can be found strumming a guitar, but nothing truly distracts them from their purpose. “We are fighting for democracy,” says Maria. “We will fight with whatever we have.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/08 Brazil police arrest 300 capitol protesters
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/jair-bolsonaro-supporters-storm-brazils-congress-buildings-11673208386?mod=hp_lead_pos1">https://www.wsj.com/articles/jair-bolsonaro-supporters-storm-brazils-congress-buildings-11673208386?mod=hp_lead_pos1</a>
GIST	SÃO PAULO—Thousands of protesters supporting Brazil’s former President Jair Bolsonaro <a href="#">stormed the presidential palace, Congress and the Supreme Court</a> in the capital Brasília Sunday, many calling for military intervention to remove Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the leftist leader <a href="#">who took office</a> last week.

Protesters dressed in Brazil's national green and yellow colors charged into the country's most important government buildings Sunday afternoon, smashing windows and furniture and ripping up documents before riot police forced them back into the streets by nightfall. Some 300 people were arrested, police said.

Mr. da Silva, who was some 500 miles away from the capital on Sunday visiting flood victims in the state of São Paulo, called the protesters "fanatic fascists," and decreed a state of federal intervention in Brasília, an emergency measure by which the federal government temporarily replaces state authorities in charge of public security.

The 77-year-old leader, a standard-bearer of the Latin American left, accused Brasília's military police of not acting to contain the protesters, many of whom had marched for more than an hour to get to the presidential palace. "They did absolutely nothing," said Mr. da Silva of the military police, which counts many supporters of Mr. Bolsonaro among its ranks.

Mr. Bolsonaro condemned any attacks on government buildings. "Peaceful demonstrations, within the law, are part of democracy," he wrote on Twitter. "However, vandalism and the invasion of public buildings like today's acts, and like those practiced by the left in 2013 and 2017, are an exception," he wrote, referring to previous waves of protests in the country.

An outspoken former army captain and [friend of Donald Trump](#), Mr. Bolsonaro [has yet to publicly concede](#) that he lost the election, which [Mr. da Silva won in October](#) with 51% of the vote.

For months, Mr. Bolsonaro had said there was widespread fraud during October's vote, without presenting evidence, polarizing the country's electorate. He filed a request with the electoral court to annul ballots cast on most electronic voting machines, which would have overturned the Oct. 30 result. The request was turned down by the court.

Mr. Bolsonaro left Brazil for Orlando, Fla., shortly before Mr. da Silva was inaugurated on Jan. 1, the first president in the country's recent democratic period to decline to take part in the symbolic act of handing over the presidential sash to his successor.

"This is exactly what the ex-president was encouraging his supporters to do," Mr. da Silva said of Sunday's riots, shortly before getting on a plane back to Brasília. Television images showed the president inspecting damage to the presidential palace, where rioters also invaded the office of his wife, Rosângela Lula da Silva, known as Janja, leaving broken glass and furniture strewn across the floor.

Mr. Bolsonaro rebutted accusations of inciting the attack, tweeting that he had always respected the constitution.

U.S. officials and Latin American leaders criticized the attacks on Brazil's government.

President Biden called the riot "outrageous" during a visit to the U.S.-Mexico border. He wrote on Twitter: "I condemn the assault on democracy and on the peaceful transfer of power in Brazil. Brazil's democratic institutions have our full support and the will of the Brazilian people must not be undermined."

Chilean President Gabriel Boric said in a statement posted on Twitter: "The Brazilian government has our full support in the face of this cowardly and vile attack on democracy." Officials in Argentina, Colombia and Mexico also issued messages supporting Mr. da Silva's administration.

Mr. Bolsonaro, who still describes himself as Brazil's president on his social media profiles, has largely remained silent since losing October's election, the closest presidential race in Brazil's history.

In November, in his first public appearance after the loss, Mr. Bolsonaro vowed to respect the constitution. But he said in a December speech, "Nothing is lost. The only real end is death." In his final live broadcast over Facebook before he left for the U.S., he urged his supporters not to "throw in the towel."



People close to the former president's administration said he was concerned that he might be arrested, accused of encouraging anti-democratic acts, if he remained in Brazil.

Groups of Mr. Bolsonaro's supporters have camped in front of army headquarters across the country since October's election, calling for the military to intervene to keep him in power. Last month, pro-Bolsonaro protesters burned buses, [clashed with police](#) and tried to force their way into the Federal Police headquarters in Brasília.

Even after Mr. da Silva took office, many of Mr. Bolsonaro's hard-core supporters said they believed the inauguration ceremony was faked and that Mr. Bolsonaro remained the rightful leader of the country.

Some political analysts likened Sunday's act to the Jan. 6, 2021, riot in the U.S., in which supporters of former President [Donald Trump](#) tried to sabotage the counting of Electoral College votes that gave the presidential election to [Joe Biden](#).

"It shows just how many challenges are ahead for democracy," said Rafael Cortez, a political scientist at the São Paulo-based consulting firm Tendências.

Ibaneis Rocha, governor of the federal district in which Brasília is located, wrote on Twitter that he was taking all measures to contain the protesters and punish those responsible.

He added that he had fired the federal district's public security secretary, Anderson Torres, Mr. Bolsonaro's former justice minister and a federal police chief, whom Brazilian press reported to be in the U.S. Sunday. Mr. Torres couldn't be reached for comment.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 Sweden: can't meet Turkey demands</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/sweden-cant-meet-turkeys-demands-on-nato-expansion-prime-minister-says-11673199080">https://www.wsj.com/articles/sweden-cant-meet-turkeys-demands-on-nato-expansion-prime-minister-says-11673199080</a>
GIST	<p>ISTANBUL—Sweden's prime minister said Sunday that his country can't meet some of the <a href="#">demands made by Turkey</a> in order for the Nordic nation <a href="#">to enter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization</a>.</p> <p>"Turkey both confirms that we did what we said we would do, but they also say they want things we can't and don't want to give them," said Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson, speaking at a security conference in Sälén, Sweden.</p> <p>He also said it was "impossible to know" <a href="#">whether Turkey would ratify</a> Sweden's application before Turkey's coming election, which was initially scheduled for June but likely to be held earlier.</p> <p>The comments point to an impasse between Sweden, Finland and Turkey, which has threatened to block the two countries' <a href="#">application to join the alliance</a> over objections to their ties to Kurdish separatist groups. Both countries <a href="#">ended decades of neutrality</a> by deciding to join NATO last year in reaction to <a href="#">Russia's invasion of Ukraine</a>.</p> <p>Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan initially threatened to veto the Nordic nations' membership last May, citing what he argued was their support for the Kurdistan Workers' Party, known as the PKK. The group is designated a terrorist organization by Turkey, the European Union and the U.S., but the group's Syrian branch is a U.S. and western military partner in the continuing campaign against Islamic State extremists. Sweden has disputed Mr. Erdogan's allegations as misinformation.</p> <p>Turkey, Sweden and Finland signed an agreement in June that was designed to resolve the dispute by setting up a security dialogue among the three nations. Sweden and Finland also agreed to address extradition requests made by Turkey of alleged terrorism suspects.</p>



Following the signing of the agreement, Mr. Erdogan and other Turkish officials have insisted that Sweden hasn't done enough to meet its demands, creating an impasse that has persisted for months.

All but two members of NATO have ratified Sweden and Finland's accession to the alliance, with only Turkey and Hungary remaining. Hungary has said its parliament would vote on the expansion of the organization early this year.

Turkey's extradition requests are at the heart of the dispute. In the agreement they signed in June, Finland and Sweden only agreed to address Turkey's requests for extradition within the framework of their own laws and a European treaty on extraditions.

Sweden in September lifted restrictions on arms sales to Turkey that had been in place since a 2019 Turkish military incursion in Syria that targeted Kurdish militants.

Turkey's state news service in May published a list of the people Ankara wants to be extradited from Sweden. The list includes suspected PKK members, an exiled Turkish journalist and one person whose family says he died in 2015.

In December, Sweden's supreme court blocked the extradition of Bulent Kenes, an exiled Turkish newspaper editor. The Turkish government has accused Mr. Kenes of being a member of the Gulen movement, which Turkey blames for a failed 2016 military coup attempt. The court said Mr. Kenes was at risk of persecution for his political beliefs.

Mr. Erdogan faces a difficult re-election battle in Turkey's coming national election, where he faces widespread dissatisfaction with the state of the country's economy, which suffers from 64% inflation after peaking at over 85% last year. Much of the Turkish public has been supportive of his hard-line stance against Sweden and Finland.

Mr. Kristersson, who leads a conservative government elected in September that has been generally enthusiastic about boosting security ties with Turkey, said on Sunday that Sweden can't override its own laws and judicial institutions.

"From time to time, Turkey mentions individuals that they want to see extradited from Sweden. My reply is that those issues are handled according to Swedish law. Swedish citizens will never be extradited to another country at all," he said.

"There are a lot of factors at play here, domestic political factors as well as Sweden's ability to prove that we're serious about what we've said," he also said.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, speaking at the same security conference on Sunday, reiterated his view that Sweden and Finland had fulfilled their responsibilities under the June agreement with Turkey.

"I am happy that the agreement has been followed through," he said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/08 Amid torrential rains, Calif. drought over?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/californias-torrential-rains-dont-mean-the-drought-is-over-11673136185?mod=hp_listb_pos1">https://www.wsj.com/articles/californias-torrential-rains-dont-mean-the-drought-is-over-11673136185?mod=hp_listb_pos1</a>
GIST	One of the <a href="#">wettest two-week periods</a> on record in California brought much-needed water to its reservoirs and snow to its mountains, but researchers and officials said it would take several more winter storms to make a dent in the drought that has sapped reservoirs, fallowed farmland and forced homeowners to <a href="#">let lawns turn brown</a> .

California has been drenched in the past few weeks by heavy rains and, at higher elevations, snow, caused by an atmospheric river, a flowing column of condensed water vapor in the atmosphere that produces significant levels of rain and snow. Swaths of the state received 15 or more inches of rain over the past two weeks, according to the National Weather Service.

At least two people died, and more than 100,000 lost power amid flooding, high winds and downed trees and power lines. With 10.3 inches of rain between Dec. 26 and Jan. 4, downtown San Francisco experienced its wettest 10-day period since 1871, according to the National Weather Service.

Starting Monday, the National Weather Service has forecast continued storms with the potential for flash flooding and mudslides in northern and central California, as an even stronger atmospheric river moves in.

Brad Pugh, a meteorologist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center, said despite the recent and predicted downpours, climate scientists give Northern California even chances of getting the same, more or less precipitation than usual for the first three months of this year.

"It's going to be really hard to recover," said Richard Heim, a meteorologist with NOAA. "I want to say, 'Yay!' in the short term. But we need more—a lot more—in the long term."

California and the western U.S. have bounced in and out of drought conditions for more than two decades, Mr. Heim said, and the state has racked up huge rainfall deficits in recent years. Rainfall totals for the past three years at Shasta Lake, a major reservoir, are 92 inches short of historical averages.

As a result, the American West is currently the driest it has been in 1,200 years, according to researchers who analyzed tree-ring records—dealing a blow to [hydroelectric-power supplies](#) and the [recreational boating industry](#), and forcing [cutbacks to farmers](#) and residential areas.

"Drought is not just what happened last week or what happened last month," Mr. Heim said.

Karla Nemeth, director of the state Department of Water Resources, said it is too soon for residents and local governments to ease restrictions placed on farms and homeowners. While recent storms lifted the state's snowpack—which typically melts into usable water in the spring—to 189% of average for this time of year, there's no guarantee the pace will continue.

Record-breaking December snowfall in 2021 was followed by the [driest January-through-March ever recorded by the state](#). After reaching 154% of normal readings on Jan. 1 last year, snowpack in the Sierra Nevada mountain range had fallen to 63% by March.

Lake Oroville and Shasta Lake, the state's two largest water-storage facilities, are currently filled to 79% and 60% of historical averages, respectively, as of Friday. Before the recent rains, they were at 57% and 55%.

"We've just dug such a big hole in our actual stored supplies that it is going to take multiple storms like this for those reservoirs to fill," Ms. Nemeth said. "I want four more ice-cold storms just like this."

Adding to the challenge, California doesn't have the capacity to retain all the water that falls during short-term deluges like the ones it is currently experiencing. Its reservoirs are managed to leave room to hold snow that melts in the spring, largely for flood-control purposes.

As a result, federal regulators are currently allowing runoff from the Sierra Nevada mountains to spill out of Folsom Lake near Sacramento, though the facility is halfway full. In October, at the beginning of the rainy season, Folsom was 35% full.

California voters passed a \$7.5 billion bond measure in 2012 to help build new storage facilities and make other water improvements. The state approved some of that money in 2018 to help build the Sites Reservoir, 75 miles northwest of Sacramento, which would hold enough runoff from wet years like this to meet the needs of roughly nine million people for a year. But the project has been mired in regulatory delays.

In addition, researchers say the [continuing shrinkage of the Colorado River](#), which supplies water to 40 million people in the Southwest including California, is dire and could take longer than the drought to resolve.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/08 Social media aided mayhem in Brazil
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/01/08/brazil-bolsonaro-twitter-facebook/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/01/08/brazil-bolsonaro-twitter-facebook/</a>
GIST	<p>In the weeks leading up to Sunday’s <a href="#">violent attacks</a> on Brazil’s congress and other government buildings, the country’s social media channels surged with calls to attack gas stations, refineries and other infrastructure, as well as for people to come to a “war cry party” in the capital, according to Brazilian social media researchers.</p> <p>Online influencers who deny the results of the country’s recent presidential election used a particular phrase to summon “patriots” to what they called a “Festa da Selma” — tweaking the word “selva,” a military term for war cry, by substituting an “m” for the “v” in hopes of avoiding detection from Brazilian authorities, who have wide latitude to arrest people for “anti-democratic” postings online. “Festa” is the Portuguese word for “party.”</p> <p>Organizers on Telegram posted dates, times and routes for “Liberty Caravans” that would pick people up in at least six Brazilian states and ferry them to the party, according to posts viewed by The Washington Post. One post said, “Attention Patriots! We are organizing for a thousand buses. We need 2 million people in Brasilia.”</p> <p>That online activism culminated in busloads of people landing in the capital Sunday, where they stormed and vandalized three major government buildings, reportedly setting fires and stealing weapons in the most significant assault on the country’s democratic institutions since a military coup in 1964.</p> <p>Brazilian analysts have long warned of the risk in Brazil of an incident akin to the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. In the months and weeks leading up to the country’s presidential election in October — in which leftist Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva defeated the right-wing incumbent, Jair Bolsonaro — social media channels were flooded with disinformation, along with calls in Portuguese to “Stop the Steal” and cries for a military coup should Bolsonaro lose the election.</p> <p>On TikTok, researchers found that five out of eight of the top search results for the keyword “ballots” were for terms such as “rigged ballots” and “ballots being manipulated.” At the same time, Facebook and Instagram directed thousands of users who plugged in basic search terms about the election toward groups questioning the integrity of the vote. On Telegram, an organizing hub for Brazil’s far right, a viral video taken down by authorities called for the murder of the children of leftist Lula supporters.</p> <p>In the days following the final election tally on Oct. 30, Bolsonaro supporters who rejected the results blocked major highways across the country. These blockades morphed into demonstrations in dozens of cities, where supporters camped out in front of military bases for weeks. Some held signs saying “Stolen Election” in English, a testament to the close ties between right-wing movements in both countries.</p> <p>Though Lula’s inauguration last week took place largely without incident, calls for violence and destruction have accelerated online in recent weeks, said researcher Michele Prado, an independent analyst who studies digital movements and the Brazilian far right.</p>

“For years now, our country has been going through a very strong process of radicalizing people to extremist views — principally online,” she said. “But in the last two weeks, I’ve seen ever-growing calls from people incentivizing extremism and calling for direct action to dismantle public infrastructure. Basically, people are saying we need to stop the country in its tracks and generate chaos.”

Posts demanding a coup, along with common pro-Bolsonaro hashtags claiming “election fraud,” and “stolen election,” have circulated on all social media services. The most violent rhetoric as well as the most direct organizing has taken place on the largely unmoderated messaging service Telegram.

Researchers in Brazil said Twitter in particular was a place to watch because it is heavily used by a circle of right-wing influencers — Bolsonaro allies who continue to promote election fraud narratives. Several influencers have had their accounts banned in Brazil and now reside in the United States. Bolsonaro himself was on vacation in Florida on Sunday.

Billionaire Elon Musk, who completed his acquisition of Twitter in late October, fired the company’s entire staff in Brazil except for a few salespeople, said a person familiar with the firings who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe sensitive matters. Among those fired in early November included eight people, based in Sao Paulo, who moderated content on the platform to catch posts that broke its rules against incitement to violence and misinformation, the person said. The person said they were not aware of any teams actively moderating rule-breaking content on Twitter in Brazil.

Criticism specifically targeting Alexandre de Moraes, a judge at the Superior Electoral Court and the Supreme Federal Court who is despised by Bolsonaro supporters because he has blocked many prominent right-wing leaders from posting online, have also stepped up since the election, Prado and others said.

Footage circulating on social media from Sunday’s demonstration showed rioters pulling a chair from a government building, upon which they placed the seal of the Brazilian republic. One rioter shouted, “Look everyone, it’s Big Alexander’s chair!,” using a derogatory nickname for Moraes. Expletives followed, according to the video. It could not be confirmed if the chair had been taken from Moraes’s chambers.

Despite their seeming similarities, Brazilian researchers said, Bolsonaro supporters are careful not to draw too many comparisons to Jan. 6 in the United States because doing so could trigger arrest for inciting anti-democratic acts, a crime in Brazil. If Jan. 6 is referenced, as it was in a handful of posts this week, the utterances appear in code, said Viktor Chagas, a professor at Fluminense Federal University in Rio de Janeiro state who researches online, far-right movements.

Still, Chagas said, Sunday’s riot was “a clear attempt to emulate the invasion of the U.S. Capitol, as a reproduction of Trumpist movements and a symbolic signal of strength and transnational connections from the global far-right.”

Chagas noted that Jan. 9 is an important nationalist symbol in Brazil, marking the day the country’s first ruler, Emperor Dom Pedro I, declared that he would not return to Portugal, in what is popularly known as “I Will Stay” Day.

“It is as if Bolsonarists were equating Bolsonaro with D. Pedro I, and indicating that the former government will remain,” he said. Some posts have also referenced “I will stay day,” indicating that the demonstrations would probably continue through Monday, he added.

In a tweet on Sunday, Bolsonaro — a prolific social media user who has been relatively quiet since his election defeat — denounced the attacks: “Peaceful demonstrations, by law, are part of democracy,” he tweeted, hours after the assault began. “However, depredations and invasions of public buildings as occurred today, as well as those practiced by the left in 2013 and 2017, were outside of the law.”

Brazilian researchers said that among Bolsonaro supporters, a counternarrative had begun to circulate Sunday, blaming the Lula government and people from Lula’s party for infiltrating peaceful, democratic

	<p>demonstrations to turn the country against supporters of Bolsonaro. The counternarrative also had echoes of the Jan. 6 insurrection, in which many Trump supporters blamed left-wing activists for the violence.</p> <p>The mayhem Sunday was “a disaster,” said Paulo Figueiredo Filho, a presenter for the right-wing channel Jovem Pan who lives in Florida and has had his social media accounts canceled by Moraes. “It is Moraes’s wet dream.”</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 Ukraine sees 2023 as ‘year of victory’</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/08/ukraine-war-2023-russia-future/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/08/ukraine-war-2023-russia-future/</a>
GIST	<p>LONDON — With upgraded weaponry on the way, Western resolve holding firm, and the Ukrainian army continuing to outmaneuver and outwit Russia’s flailing military, Ukraine’s promised “year of victory” is off to a good start.</p> <p>If 2023 continues as it began, there is a good chance Ukraine will be able to fulfill President Volodymyr Zelensky’s New Year’s pledge to retake all of Ukraine by the end of the year — or at least enough territory to definitively end Russia’s threat, Western officials and analysts say.</p> <p>But while Zelensky was rallying Ukrainians to expect victory this year, Russian President Vladimir Putin used his New Year’s speeches to prepare Russians for a drawn-out fight. Russian troops are digging into fortified defensive positions reinforced by at least 100,000 newly mobilized soldiers, and though it seems unlikely that Russia can seize more territory anytime soon, it will also be tougher for Ukraine to make advances in 2023 than it was last year, despite momentum from recent victories, military experts say.</p> <p>If Kyiv cannot achieve significant breakthroughs against this entrenched, growing Russian force, there is a risk that the war will become a protracted conflict favoring Putin, said Elizabeth Shackelford of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. A \$45 billion aid package approved by Congress will tide Ukraine over for the year, she said, but with U.S. presidential elections in 2024, the longer-term outlook is harder to predict.</p> <p>“2023 is really the year,” Shackelford said. “If it doesn’t wrap in 2023, Putin will have a very big upper hand. As it is, Zelensky still has a shot because he still has very strong support.”</p> <p>“After that,” she added, “all bets are off.”</p> <p>Developments in the first week of the year suggest the prospects for Ukraine are bright, said Ben Hodges, a former commander of U.S. Army Europe. He ticked off the advantages Ukraine will be able to exploit, from high morale among an army defending its homeland to superior leadership, cohesion and seemingly unwavering Western support.</p> <p>The widespread rejection by the United States and Europe of Putin’s call for a temporary cease-fire over the Orthodox Christmas holiday delivered a clear, early reminder that Ukraine is not yet under pressure to enter into negotiations that Western officials say would probably be exploited by Moscow as an opportunity to rearm and regroup for further offensives, while tightening its grip on occupied territories.</p> <p>A New Year’s Day attack deep behind Russian lines on a makeshift Russian barracks in the occupied eastern Ukrainian city of Makiivka killed at least 89 Russian soldiers, according to Moscow — and maybe many more, according to Ukrainian and U.S. officials.</p> <p>The strike demonstrated not only Ukraine’s superior weaponry, intelligence and surveillance capabilities but also Russia’s persistent tactical missteps. Moscow blamed the attack on newly arrived recruits using cellphones, which gave away their location. U.S. officials, however, said there was some evidence that Russia had also stored ammunition in the barracks, compounding the number of casualties at the site.</p>

The same day, Ukraine said it had shot down all 45 of the Iranian-made drones launched to tarnish its New Year's festivities, a sign that Ukrainian air defenses are growing more adept at thwarting Russia's onslaught against the country's infrastructure.

Announcements by France, the United States and Germany that they would provide Ukraine with combat vehicles for the first time came as a significant boost to Ukraine offensive capabilities.

Even the weather has been kind to Ukraine, with record-breaking warm winter temperatures in Europe crashing energy prices and sparing citizens the pain that many analysts had predicted would erode European support for the Ukraine war effort.

In his announcement of the donation of light tanks, French President Emmanuel Macron, who has been widely criticized in Ukraine for seemingly seeking to appease Putin, pledged to back Ukraine "until victory," his most unequivocal statement of support so far.

As long as Western support remains strong, Hodges said he is confident that Ukraine can retake all or most Russian-occupied territory this year — including the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia occupied and annexed in 2014.

The peninsula's supply routes are potentially vulnerable to Ukrainian attacks using U.S.-supplied HIMARS (High Mobility Artillery Rocket System) precision weapons, and Ukraine may be able to force Russia to withdraw from Crimea even before it is able to retake all of the eastern Donbas region where most fighting is now focused, he said.

"I do believe Ukraine has achieved irreversible momentum and basically there is nothing the Russians can do to change that, unless they figure out a way to persuade the West to lose interest," said Hodges, who is now a senior adviser to the Washington-based Human Rights First group.

"I see a lot of positives and I don't see any weakening of resolve of the West," he added.

But the onus is now on Ukraine to remain on the offensive, which is more difficult than defending terrain, said Rob Lee, a former U.S. Marine now with the Foreign Policy Research Institute.

Ukraine's successes in 2022 were facilitated by Russian mistakes that are less likely to be repeated now that Russian troops are digging in for the long haul, he said. "It's easier to defend than it is to attack, and the Russians have already set up long defensive positions," Lee said.

In some ways, Lee said, Ukraine has already won, not only by holding off the initial Russian onslaught but taking back almost half the territory that was snatched by Russia in the first weeks of the war.

"After the first two weeks of the war, it was clear that Russia had failed to achieve its goals," he said. "Russia's aims were so ambitious that Ukraine has won just by remaining a sovereign country. But the question now is, can Ukraine achieve what it wants, which is to return at least to the February 24 borders, if not to retake more territory than that."

"Whether it can do that," Lee added, "is what is not so clear."

Much may come down to which side runs out of ammunition first. Western officials have been predicting for months that Russia is at risk of running out of ammunition, and although that hasn't happened yet, there is continuing evidence that Russian supplies are low.

Ukrainian officials said late last year that the rate of Russian artillery fire along the eastern front is now only one-third of what it was during the summer, when Russian troops were on the offensive. And although Russia has ordered ramped-up manufacturing, it is clear Russian production will not be able to



match consumption, said a Western official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive security matters.

The depletion of Russian ammunition supplies, especially for artillery, makes it unlikely Russia will be able to mount any kind of successful offensive operation for some time, despite predictions by the Ukrainian military that Moscow is preparing a major offensive, according to an assessment by the Institute for the Study of War.

But it is also far from clear that the West will be able to keep up with Ukraine's ammunition needs, especially as offensive operations require greater quantities of materiel, said Dmitri Alperovitch, chairman of the Silverado Policy Accelerator, a Washington-based think tank.

Alperovitch predicted that Ukraine will be able to retake some territory this year but not enough to secure a definitive victory. Putin appears only to be doubling down on his determination to subjugate Ukraine, and although Russia currently lacks the capacity to launch successful offensives, the injection of freshly mobilized manpower strengthens its ability to hold back Ukrainian advances.

"I don't think this will be the year of the end of the war, unfortunately," Alperovitch said.

If the front lines do not shift significantly in the coming year, the path ahead becomes murkier.

The Russian and the Ukrainian economies both will be hard-pressed to sustain a long war. And it is unclear whether each country can generate enough manpower for a prolonged fight. Ukraine has the advantage for now, with a reserve of millions of military-aged men despite its smaller size, while Russia hauls convicts out of prisons to sustain its presence on the front lines, Hodges said.

No one is predicting that Ukraine will give up or lose outright to Russia, he said. The Ukrainians remain committed to fighting and the troops remain far more motivated than their reluctant Russian adversaries.

But a long war would defer indefinitely Ukraine's recovery, reconstruction and the return of refugees. The government would have to maintain hundreds of thousands of troops along the estimated 600-mile front line while its economy continues to collapse, going some way toward achieving Putin's goal of denying Ukraine success as an independent country.

Over time, Ukraine's offensive capabilities will be drained by the attrition of experienced and well-trained soldiers, potentially eroding the manpower advantage it has enjoyed, Lee said. And Russia would have a chance to rebuild its economy, supply lines and combat capabilities to potentially launch future offensives, as it did after the front lines froze after the separatist war in Donbas in 2014 to 2015.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's fortunes will become ever more dependent on variables outside its control, such as Western resolve, the availability of Western ammunition — and events in Russia.

"What we don't know is what will be happening in Moscow by the end of the year. There are some serious power struggles," Hodges said. Although there is no immediate evidence of any challenge to Putin's grip, the emergence of significant dissent in Moscow or a mutiny among disgruntled Russian troops could prove decisive, Alperovitch said.

Events in the United States could prove just as significant, Shackelford said. Although Europe's support is politically important, its military contributions are dwarfed by the vast quantities of arms supplied by Washington, whose future commitment could be in question if Republicans win the White House in 2024.

"If Putin can turn this into a multiyear war of attrition, he will probably be able to wait Ukraine out," Shackelford said. "It might still drag on for a while, but Ukraine's shot will really be diminished by that point."

HEADLINE	01/09 Russia fails to cripple Ukraine capital
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/09/kyiv-routine-blackouts-war-russia/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/09/kyiv-routine-blackouts-war-russia/</a>
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — Two days after a Russian missile killed her close friend on New Year’s Eve, Daria Khizhchuk was back at her job waiting tables at an upscale Italian restaurant in the Ukrainian capital.</p> <p>Her shift passed in a daze; she filled chatty customers’ orders on autopilot while consumed with grief.</p> <p>“It was the worst,” Khizhchuk said. “Sadly it is like that. There are two worlds.”</p> <p>“That’s how it has to be,” she added. “This is our last winter like this. Next year we will be free.”</p> <p>As Kyiv settles into its first winter since Russia invaded last February, residents are coping with the harsh realities of the grinding war: a constant threat of airstrikes, regular power outages, fears of nuclear attack.</p> <p>They are also carrying on. Dance studios and nail salons are open — having learned to operate with battery-powered lights even when Russian attacks on infrastructure cut power. Cafes and restaurants, often running on generators, are packed.</p> <p>The resilience of Kyiv residents is proof that Russian President Vladimir Putin has largely failed in his plans to make life unbearable by depriving their homes and businesses of heat and power this winter.</p> <p>In recent days, improved Ukrainian air defenses and repairs to infrastructure damaged by Russian strikes have provided civilians with consistent power for the first time in weeks. The boost in connectivity has lifted morale. The randomness of the power grid often meant it came down to chance who could turn on their lights and who could not — at times creating an awkwardness between the haves and have-nots.</p> <p>Olena Baibina, 50, once had steady work cleaning houses around Kyiv. That dried up when many of her loyal clients fled the capital early in the war. But recently, even as some work returned, the power outages prevented her from using a vacuum cleaner or a washing machine. Water outages added to her struggle.</p> <p>Compared with worst-case scenarios, many Ukrainians see the power outages as a manageable inconvenience. But for Baibina, it meant she could barely make enough money to survive. “I would have to go back home, because how can I work like this?” she said.</p> <p>With the threat of more attacks looming, businesses are preparing for darker days ahead. Many have purchased generators to ensure they can still operate in case of more prolonged blackouts. The Ukrainian government has installed generator-powered “invincibility points” in spaces around the capital, where residents can go to warm up and charge devices. Most people are trying to limit their use of unnecessary electricity to avoid overwhelming the grid before the coldest days of winter.</p> <p>On a recent afternoon, Khizhchuk and other friends helped Serhiy Kaharlytskiy, 42, whose wife, Iryna, was killed in the New Year’s Eve attack, clean up what was left of their home. Snow was falling and they were trying to salvage what they could from the house before even worse weather set in.</p> <p>Kaharlytskiy climbed through the wreckage and emerged holding a framed photo of him holding his wife on their wedding day in 2010. The couple and their 10-year-old son survived 10 months of Russia’s war on Ukraine only to become victims as the year came to a close.</p> <p>“In one second I lost my wife, my car and my house,” Kaharlytskiy said. “The only thing I have left is my son.”</p> <p>Still, even in his grief, he said he did not fault others for trying to relish in some sense of normalcy while they can. “If my wife hadn’t died, I could be drinking a cocktail around the corner now, too,” he said.</p> <p>From the hill where his house once stood, skiers and snowboarders could be seen zigzagging through the snow on an urban ski slope nearby, even as air raid sirens warned of another possible attack.</p>

When asked if she feared a strike in the area, Daria Nadolgo, who was learning to snowboard for the first time that day, replied: “I’m more scared I’ll fall here.”

Distracting herself with a hobby, she said, is “good for our mental health.”

Not all Ukrainians see it that way.

Baibina, the house cleaner, lives in a low-income neighborhood in Kyiv. As some residents of the capital enjoy nightlife and embrace the relative return to normalcy compared with the start of the invasion, she is struggling to make ends meet.

“Boys are stuck in trenches, freezing and dying, and you’re doing this? While I work for some pennies in order to buy some bread and water, you allow yourself this?” she said. “There’s a war happening.”

Mia Willard, 24, a Ukrainian American who lives on Kyiv’s left bank, is studying online at the University of Central Florida. The war has shifted her priorities, with most of her time now spent on humanitarian work. But she knows she must still complete her online assignments — even when she goes weeks without steady power.

“I would go to sleep whenever we didn’t have electricity,” she said. When power came back on, she would rush to charge her devices and download any readings she needed for class. She would sit on the floor of a nearby supermarket turned invincibility point to take advantage of its generator power. Once, she worked through the night in the office of the international political think tank where she works on the other side of town to complete an assignment on time.

She knows her fellow students in the United States are not coping with similar conditions. “I can’t imagine life not in a war zone,” she said. “It’s inconvenient but not so terribly bad.”

Kyrylo Trembovetskyi, 26, works for a Ukrainian internet company. His office bought generators and extra batteries to ensure their routers do not lose connection.

“I’m getting very used to these circumstances,” he said. “When there are thoughts of getting tired of it all, I think about the boys at the front.”

Daryna Polishchuk, 19, is a student who cuts hair part time in a small salon in a market in a neighborhood on the left bank. During a recent attack, she heard sirens and booms but had two clients waiting. She didn’t close the shop and return home until she had taken care of them. “I had to finish them up,” Polishchuk said. “I can’t do anything [about the attack] anyway.”

Grasping onto routine is how people here are coping, said Ihor Kostetskiy, a dance teacher in Kyiv.

In November, as air raid sirens blared and strikes hit the capital, he told his students to stay in their shelters. Then, about 6 p.m., the sirens stopped. He was in the studio, he wrote to his students, if anyone wanted to stop by. After a day of intense Russian bombardment, 10 people showed up to dance.

“I think it’s a great outlet for overflowing emotions,” Kostetskiy said.

Since the strikes that killed civilians on New Year’s Eve, he said, even more students have reached out to him about signing up. “I really want to dance,” he said one prospective student wrote to him. “I don’t want to postpone. There’s no time like now.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/06 After Olympia’s Jan 6, 2021 confrontation?
SOURCE	<a href="https://crosscut.com/politics/2023/01/what-happened-after-jan-6-confrontation-olympia">https://crosscut.com/politics/2023/01/what-happened-after-jan-6-confrontation-olympia</a>

Two years after a violent riot engulfed the nation's Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, it's easy to forget that here in the other Washington a protest against federal election results also turned into a tense confrontation on the capitol campus in Olympia.

Although the incident, during which more than 100 people broke through a fence and onto the grounds surrounding the governor's mansion, never became as violent or deadly as the one that shook Washington, D.C., it was still an unprecedented and serious threat to the state's democratic institutions.

Chris Loftis, director of communications for the Washington State Patrol, remembers that day well. "I've never been prouder of these people who came together and said look, there's a real and present danger to the people, the processes and the places of democracy," Loftis said in a recent phone interview. "We're going to step into that breach and create a line that you will not pass."

Shauna Sowersby, now a state government reporter for McClatchy, was a freelance reporter for Crosscut that day in Olympia. "It was just ... such a scary day," Sowersby said. She remembered a moment that afternoon when someone armed with an assault rifle was speaking to the crowd and urging protesters to kill all the reporters there. "That was probably the most terrifying moment," Sowersby remembered.

Her [reporting](#) (alongside that of David Kroman and Melissa Santos) and [tweets](#) captured the day's chaotic events – which ramped up from a protest into a tense altercation in which armed protesters stood outside the doors of the mansion where Gov. Jay Inslee and his wife reside, shouting at the handful of law enforcement officers stationed there.

Loftis said that two years later, only four people have been arrested for the most egregious offenses that day (and charges against one of them were later dropped).

And the Washington State Patrol, in cooperation with the Washington State Department of Enterprise Services – which manages security on the state capitol campus – have rethought their approach to keeping the Legislature, the governor's mansion, and the Washington Supreme Court safe, Loftis said.

"The number of the personnel on site 24/7 has been ramped up appreciably," he said, although he declined to provide specific details. The state has added concrete planters, fencing, and surveillance equipment – as well as revised planning – to help prevent a similar upheaval.

"It all gives us the ability to respond to a crisis as quickly as possible and hopefully to mitigate and reduce chances of there ever being a crisis in the first place," he said.

In addition, the Legislature passed a bill in 2021 [banning the open carry of guns](#) on the capitol campus.

The events of Jan. 6, 2021, in Olympia began about noon, at about the same moment the nation watched a crowd of election deniers smash windows in the U.S. Capitol building, violently breach defenses, and nearly stop the certification of the election while members of Congress sheltered in place.

Sowersby said that at first, the protest on the legislative building's north steps was energetic, but not unusually so.

"It started off pretty normal," she said, but noted that as people in the crowd became more aware of events in Washington, D.C., the tone began to change. "They started making all these claims of election fraud, and it started getting more and more heated."

Tensions in Olympia had actually been simmering for more than a month prior. Armed groups of right-leaning protesters regularly expressed concern about the state's COVID-19 restrictions and unfounded accusations of election fraud. They clashed with left-leaning protesters during several weekends in early December. Sowersby witnessed a [shooting on the state capitol campus](#) on Dec. 12, 2020.

She said members of the Proud Boys and leftist anti-fascist groups had been brawling that afternoon, and when some of the leftist protesters began hurling rocks at a member of the Proud Boys who was trying to get into his car, he opened fire.

"It didn't even seem like he was aiming at anything," she said. "He kind of shot wildly into this group of people." One protester was shot, but survived. "It was quite something to see someone that pale and bleeding out. And people trying to get him into a car and to the hospital. It was crazy."

Loftis said the State Patrol had to activate its rapid deployment force on or near the capitol campus 13 times in response to armed and clashing protesters from the onset of COVID restrictions in early 2020 until the events of Jan. 6.

"I don't want to be dismissive," he said, "but Jan. 6 wasn't a period at the end of the sentence, but an exclamation point in the middle of a paragraph." He said the level of violent activity hadn't been seen in the capital since the 1960s or perhaps ever.

That violence was definitely on Sowersby's mind when some of the speakers at the Jan. 6 rally started using more strident language. Joey Gibson, a Clark county resident and founder of the right-wing group Patriot Prayer, spoke to the crowd, Sowersby said, telling protesters about claims of election fraud, and, she said, "how the media's in on this and they think you're stupid – really getting the crowd riled up."

Sowersby said that at about 2:45, the final speaker, Tusitala "Tiny" Toese, a well-known right wing activist also from Clark County, urged the crowd to march toward the governor's mansion.

It was about this time that one protester who had earlier fired up the crowd by telling them "The time to talk is over, they're storming the Capitol, it's war now," shouted out something about killing all the reporters there. "And everybody in the crowd cheered," Sowersby said.

The protesters, armed with everything from assault rifles to a baseball bat studded with nails, arrived at the gates of the governor's mansion and began shaking the iron fence. Eventually the crowd realized a door in the gate was unlocked, opened it and streamed into the grounds below the mansion.

Only a handful of state troopers were on hand, and Sowersby remembers one woman officer being surrounded by the crowd and then managing to retreat back toward the mansion.

It was around this time that Sowersby was confronted by Damon Huseman, an armed protester from Seattle who had earlier confronted another journalist and photographer and made threatening statements to other members of the media. Huseman was later [arrested](#), and in March 2021 pleaded guilty to third-degree assault, criminal trespass and harassment.

The crowd shouted at the officers stationed at the doors of the mansion, Sowersby said, and after being questioned by several protesters and fearing for her safety, she moved away from the protesters to join a group of other journalists. By about 3:15, she remembers, more police arrived and the crowd began to disperse.

In the weeks following, more than 600 members of the Washington National Guard were activated and stood guard over the capitol campus until after the presidential inauguration on Jan. 20, 2021.

Loftis said those moments, from the time when the crowd breached the gates until after the inauguration, were among the highlights of his career. "I'm proud of all these people, from the governor to the strangers in khaki uniforms I saw walking by my office in those days," he said.

"I was proud to be a small part of saying: This stops here. You're not going to take over this building. You're not going to interfere with the process and these people making laws and debating ideas," he said.

	<p>In addition to Huseman, one other person was charged in 2021 with assault and trespass, and in January 2022, Tusitala Toese was arrested and charged with assault, obstruction of justice, and criminal trespass for his actions on Jan. 6. His prosecution is ongoing and has been delayed because of other charges <a href="#">he faces in Oregon</a>.</p> <p>Although things have quieted significantly since those tense days two years ago, Sowersby said the potential for a similar conflict feels very real. “It scares me a lot. I was kind of naive before all this stuff went down,” she said.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/09 Philippine defense chief quits in shakeup</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/philippine-defense-chief-quits-in-latest-security-shakeup/">https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/philippine-defense-chief-quits-in-latest-security-shakeup/</a>
GIST	<p>MANILA, Philippines (AP) — The acting Philippine defense chief has resigned, officials said Monday, in the latest in a series of top-level changes in the country’s security establishment that has sparked speculation of renewed military unrest.</p> <p>President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. accepted “with deep regret” the resignation of defense officer-in-charge Jose Faustino Jr. and offered the top defense post to Carlito Galvez Jr., another retired general who has been involved in peace talks with insurgent groups, presidential spokesperson Cheloy Garafil said.</p> <p>Galvez has accepted the offer, Garafil said without providing other details, including why Faustino, a former military chief of staff, decided to resign.</p> <p>Marcos on Saturday cut short the term of military chief of staff Lt. Gen. Bartolome Bacarro, whom he had appointed five months ago, and replaced him with a retiring general without explaining the surprise move.</p> <p>Faustino is a supporter of Bacarro and the two were classmates at the Philippine Military Academy. Bacarro received the highest military award for combat bravery as a young army officer and his three-year term was supposed to continue until August 2025.</p> <p>The appointment of military chiefs is a sensitive issue. The military has a history of restiveness, failed coup attempts and corruption scandals, and has faced accusations of human rights violations. Efforts have been made for years to instill professionalism in the military and insulate it from the country’s traditionally chaotic and corruption-tainted politics.</p> <p>Lt. Gen. Andres Centino, a military chief of staff whom Bacarro replaced in August last year, was reinstated by Marcos to the top post of the 144,000-strong armed forces. Centino, who was due to retire next month, was chosen over a dozen senior generals and will have a fresh three-year term.</p> <p>A new law that took effect last year fixed the term of the military chief of staff to three years to allow the top general more time to initiate reforms and press a years-long campaign to modernize the underfunded military, which faces Muslim and communist insurgencies and increasingly aggressive actions by China in the disputed South China Sea, where the Philippines claims contested islands, islets and reefs along with other nations.</p> <p>Bacarro’s sudden removal sparked speculation of renewed military restiveness after the national police went on alert over the weekend. But national police spokesperson Col. Jean Fajardo denied the move was linked to any military restiveness and said personnel were placed on “heightened alert” mainly to secure an annual religious gathering in Manila.</p> <p>In a turnover ceremony at the main military camp in the capital on Saturday, Bacarro handed a saber symbolizing the military’s leadership to Centino. Neither Marcos nor Faustino attended the ceremony.</p>



	<p>Bacarro's removal followed a decision by the national police chief, Gen. Rodolfo Azurin Jr., to tender his resignation on Thursday after Marcos's interior secretary appealed to nearly 1,000 police generals and colonels to quit to allow a committee to investigate top officials involved in illegal drugs.</p> <p>Azurin asked top police officials to support Interior Secretary Benhur Abalos's drastic move. But he said some generals opposed the call for them to resign within the month because they were not facing any criminal lawsuits and had not been linked to the drug trade.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 Migrant camps cleared ahead visit</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11609673/El-Paso-clears-migrant-camps-ahead-Bidens-visit-border-crossings-drop-trickle.html">https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11609673/El-Paso-clears-migrant-camps-ahead-Bidens-visit-border-crossings-drop-trickle.html</a>
GIST	<p>When President <a href="#">Joe Biden</a> makes his first visit to the border with <a href="#">Mexico</a> on Sunday, he will hear from aid workers helping manage the immigration crisis and from local officials desperate for more support.</p> <p>What he won't see are the miserable makeshift camps dotted around El Paso that triggered headlines last month about migrants taking over the streets.</p> <p>On Tuesday and Wednesday law enforcement teams moved through the downtown area, picking up migrants who had entered the country illegally.</p> <p>As a result, he may get a view of the border but not of the crisis, say infuriated border agents who wanted him to see the scale of the chaos last month.</p> <p>'It's a dog and pony show,' said a volunteer helping dozens of migrants seeking shelter at the Sacred Heart Church. 'They've cleaned it all up for him.'</p> <p>Officials say they are just enforcing the rules and that any timing is coincidence.</p> <p>But a day before the president's arrival and the scene could not be more different to the chaos of late December. Migrant numbers surged then as arrivals timed their journeys to coincide with the expected end of Title 42 — a Trump-era restriction that eventually won a stay of execution at the Supreme Court.</p> <p>Then hundreds of mainly Venezuelan refugees camped out on the sidewalks around the Greyhound Bus station in downtown.</p> <p>Now their bundles of clothes and belongings are gone after border agents moved through the area during the week.</p> <p>Only a few dozen migrants remained on the sidewalk around the Sacred Heart Church downtown on Saturday. Illegal arrivals say they are protected by the church's sanctuary status so long as they do not step off the kerb.</p> <p>Brandon Judd, president of the National Border Patrol Council, said his 18,000 members had been waiting two years for Biden to come and see what they had to deal with every day.</p> <p>He said the White House knew what it was doing with a January visit.</p> <p>The number of daily encounters had dropped from about 7500 a couple of weeks ago, he said, to about 3300 now — a seasonal pattern that happens every year.</p> <p>'Biden has all those figures. He knows all the trends. He knows when the best time to come to the border. And he knows that the beginning of January is absolutely the best time,' he said.</p> <p>His union issued an acerbic tweet when the visit was announced.</p>

'El Paso being cleaned up as if nothing unusual ever happened there. Just in time for Biden's "visit to the border,"' it said.

'We suggest just landing in Des Moines, Iowa and telling him it's El Paso. He'll never know the difference.'

Biden is expected to be on the ground for just three hours, according to the official White House itinerary.

That was not nearly enough time to get a grip on the issue, added Judd.

'You've got to spend a little bit of time you've got to be able to speak with people,' he said.

'You've got to be able to get their ideas and three hours is not going to give him that.'

At the same time, a security officer told DailyMail.com that the number of encounters along the El Paso sector of the border had fallen to a trickle after 400 troops were deployed at the end of last month.

Official figures have yet to be released, but he said: 'We have Texas National Guard deployed, setting up about two miles of additional concertina wire and soldiers on the border right now.'

'And we've seen our number of encounters and illegal crossings in urban El Paso go down dramatically.'

That makes for a remarkable turnaround. In the last week of December, when migrants were hoping that Title 42 would be lifted, officials said about 2,500 migrants were arriving in El Paso daily.

Among them was Jose Vargas, who said he was fleeing the oppressive regime of Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela.

He said he managed to avoid border guards and had yet to claim asylum.

Now the 32-year-old said he was working out what to do next.

'I'm hoping that the government of the U.S. will let us stay until Maduro has gone,' he said. 'And then I will go back.'

Biden will be hoping his visit silences opponents who say he has failed to take the crisis seriously. And he arrives days after unveiling his latest plan to tackle the problem.

On Thursday he announced he was expanding Trump-era restrictions to rapidly expel Cuban, Haitian, and Nicaraguan migrants caught illegally crossing the southern border.

Instead, the U.S. will accept 30,000 people per month from those three countries, as well as Venezuela, so long as they arrive legally.

It represents an attempt both to head off Republican criticism that it has allowed record numbers to cross the U.S.-Mexico border, and to address concerns from within the Democratic Party that Biden has been too slow to shake off Trump-era restrictions that prevent those in need from seeking asylum.

The administration is preparing for the end of Title 42, a public health regulation that allows the expulsion of migrants before they can claim asylum in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Yet the proposals immediately triggered anger on both sides, with Republicans saying it was too little, too late and some Democrats saying it expanded restrictions imposed by President Donald Trump.

Even in announcing the plan, Biden acknowledged that it was far from perfect.

	<p>'The actions we're announcing today will make things better ... will make things better but will not fix the border problem completely,' he said.</p> <p>Local politicians are not holding their breath. They see Biden's as nothing but a carefully-managed photo opportunity.</p> <p>Robert Pena, executive director of the El Paso Republican Party, said he expected it to go down like Vice President Kamala Harris's trip in 2021.</p> <p>'He'll get to have his picture taken at the border. But he'll only see what they want him to see, and he won't see the thousands of people coming across,' he said.</p> <p>Local officials, as they confirmed the clearances, said they were part of regular programs to enforce the law.</p> <p>'Border Patrol agents conduct enforcement actions in accordance with DHS policy without denying access to needed medical care, access to schools by children, access to places of worship, access to disaster or emergency relief sites and other protected areas,' El Paso sector Border Patrol officials said in a statement.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/09 Taiwan seeks to bolster military readiness</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.foxnews.com/world/inspired-ukraine-taiwan-seeks-bolster-military-preparedness-china-threat-continues">https://www.foxnews.com/world/inspired-ukraine-taiwan-seeks-bolster-military-preparedness-china-threat-continues</a>
GIST	<p>KAOHSIUNG CITY, Taiwan — After close to a decade, men over 18 in Taiwan will again be required to serve a full year in the military rather than just four months, a return to a <a href="#">conscription policy</a> that had been in place since 2013. The new requirement will be phased in over the year and will reportedly apply to males born on or after Jan. 1, 2005.</p> <p>Speaking to the nation late last month, Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen pointed to Ukraine holding off the might of the Russian military for more than 300 days, something she argued was due in no small part to Ukraine's readiness. Tsai said Ukraine's strong resistance capacity had "bought time" that allowed the international community to come to its aid. Taiwan's president said she and her cabinet, as well as military officials, had spent much time debating the issue and that although it was "a difficult choice," expanding the length of conscription was necessary. She also announced that the basic monthly pay for conscripts would jump from around US\$212 per month to just under US\$662.</p> <p><a href="#">Russia's underperformance</a> in the war in Ukraine has been highly instructive and motivating for Taiwan's civilian and military leaders. But of course, China has also been taking notes as it watches Ukraine — and for Taiwan, the hope is that China is learning one major lesson from Russia's stumbles: that even a vastly overpowered nation is hard to beat on its home turf, especially if its people are trained and willing to resist.</p> <p>Experts in both Taiwan and the United States, though, have long expressed worries about a seeming complacency in Taiwan regarding defense. Taiwan's leadership says they are addressing these concerns with more scrutiny of weapons and tactics — and by reinstating a year of conscription.</p> <p>In comments to Fox News Digital, Su Tzu-yun, a research fellow and director of defense strategy at the Taipei-based Institute for National Defense and Security Research, notes that an all-volunteer military is a preference, but both here and globally, it's becoming harder to recruit professional soldiers.</p> <p>"China has increased its force projection capabilities," Su said. "All of this means that Taiwan needs to increase the size of its active army." Su noted Taiwan is carefully studying the examples of nations such as Sweden, Norway and Israel — all of which maintain conscription — as it seeks to overhaul its defense configuration so that "the sum of manpower and firepower can be multiplied for defense by asymmetrical battle strength."</p>

"If it's going to be four months, we might as well not do it at all. So much money was wasted on these few months of training," a retired Taiwanese air force captain told Fox News Digital. Choosing to withhold his name, the retired captain said, "No one wants a war, and I don't think one is imminent, but if it comes, we need to have soldiers who at least know the basics." He also compared Taiwan's [military requirements to those in Israel](#) and said a discussion on mandatory training for women could be a good next step.

It's not hard to understand why Taiwan (officially called the Republic of China) sees a need for conscription; its massive neighbor to the west, [the People's Republic of China](#) (PRC), refuses to disavow using force to "reunify" with this self-governed, fully democratic island of around 23 million. The term "reunify," however, isn't accurate as Taiwan has never been ruled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

China's bullying of Taiwan permeates every part of the relationship between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, from China blocking Taiwan's participation in health conferences organized by the United Nations to a simulated naval blockade and live missile tests after former U.S. Speaker of the House [Nancy Pelosi defied Beijing](#) and visited Taipei in August 2022.

The new conscription policy was met with a predictable mix of emotions and opinions, but somewhat surprisingly, strong opposition has been sparse and the prevailing response — from both sides of Taiwan's main political divide — has been support for the government's move. Before Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, however, this would likely not have been the case.

Ian Easton, author of "The Chinese Invasion Threat," an influential book that examines what a China-Taiwan conflict might look like, told Fox News Digital that he found the change "remarkable" and said, "Only very rarely does a liberal democracy undertake difficult reforms like this in peacetime. Not long ago, the national conscription system was regarded as the third rail of Taiwanese politics: touch it and you die. But now any politician in Taiwan who doesn't take national security seriously is likely to be in hot water at the polls."

Easton's observation is illustrated by Enoch Wu, a politician with the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Wu, a candidate in a Jan. 8 by-election for a seat in Taiwan's parliament, made his stance clear in a May 2022 New York Times op-ed, writing, "We seem to expect American sons and daughters to risk their lives to protect our home, while relieving our own of that very duty." Tough words, but it's a sentiment that's picked up significant traction over the last year.

Of course, not everyone in Taiwan is happy about the upcoming change. Some parents and their sons have voiced displeasure and concerns. When Teresa Chen, a coffee shop owner in the southern city of Kaohsiung, heard the news, she and her husband did the math and were relieved that their 21-year-old son would not be affected by the change.

"I don't want him to lose a year, especially as he's not interested in the military," Chen told Fox News Digital.

On the other side of the same Taiwanese port city of almost 3 million, another set of parents sighed in resignation — 14-year-old Alen is now set to serve a year, and while neither Alen's parents nor the junior high schooler are looking forward to it, they all agree there are benefits to military service, from character-building to better physical fitness. Other parents agree. One Taipei father told Fox News Digital he'd rather have his son properly prepared for conflict, which of course he hopes never occurs.

A good number of people in Taiwan often argue there's little point in trying to hold off a full-on invasion from China as it is significantly stronger by almost every military standard, but experts such as Michael Turton, a long-term Taiwan-based writer, blogger and advocate for keeping the island's democracy free from interference from Beijing, says this kind of "defeatist" attitude is due in no small part to Chinese propaganda.

"Like a dull supervillain, Beijing constantly monologues about the inevitability of [Taiwan's annexation](#).

This is often echoed by local pro-China parties," Turton told Fox News Digital.

"A hidden factor is that every male [now] experiences a program of conscription that is obviously ineffective in producing a useful military response ... so it [the defeatist propaganda] does have some effect," says Turton.

Kitsch Liao, assistant director of Atlantic Council's Global China Hub, told Fox News Digital that the same "defeatist" attitude is sometimes expressed in uninformed comments by some in Taiwan about the "low quality" and "ineffectiveness" of weapons being sold to Taiwan by the United States.

"There is some back and forth," said Liao, "but mostly what we buy reflects what Taiwan asks for, so honestly if there are any complaints about what we're getting, we need to look closer at our own evaluation process. That said, there is a deeper issue regarding a lack of transparency in our force planning and evaluation processes, which can fail to engender the support our armed forces desperately need both from within and without."

As in [South Korea](#), Taiwan wrestles with concerns that mandatory time in the military could mean delayed careers and disrupted lives for its young men, but most seem to agree these concerns are dwarfed by the existential threat posed by Beijing.

"The Chinese Communist Party is carrying out the largest peacetime military buildup attempted by any country in at least a century," Ian Easton added. "Will Taiwan's defense reforms be too little too late? Quite possibly. But much still remains to be seen, and there is much the U.S. could do to help Taiwan maximize the hard task it is undertaking. If it isn't already, Washington should be looking to flood Taiwan with military trainers, advisers and liaison officers and begin large bilateral defense drills and joint patrols of the Taiwan Strait. Despite the monumental threat posed by the PRC, American military engagement with Taiwan is still surprisingly limited and tenuous."

Whether the United States should or would send more trainers or engage in joint patrols with Taiwan is up for debate, but most Taiwanese seem to be closing ranks and agreeing that, at the very least, men of fighting age should be trained well enough to offer a genuine resistance to a potential Chinese invasion.

Local news reported that by 2024, conscripts in Taiwan will undergo a longer boot camp, fire significantly more live rounds and be trained to fire powerful weapons, such as the U.S. Javelin and Stinger missiles.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 Iran hardliners turn anger on France</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/amid-unrest-irans-hardliners-turn-anger-france-96298061">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/amid-unrest-irans-hardliners-turn-anger-france-96298061</a>
GIST	<p>DUBAI, United Arab Emirates -- Iranian hardliners on Sunday burned French flags outside the French embassy in Tehran, protesting cartoons published by the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo that lampoon Iran's ruling clerics.</p> <p>The caricatures were published at a time of persistent anti-government protests in Iran, now in their fourth month. Demonstrators are calling for the downfall of its Islamic Republic and are challenging its hardline establishment.</p> <p>The demonstrations outside of the French embassy follow previous attempts by Iran's rulers to mobilize their supporters in counter-demonstrations.</p> <p>Hundreds of protesters, including students from seminary schools, shouted "Death to France" and accused French President Emmanuel Macron of insulting Iran while urging Paris to stop "animosity" toward Tehran. Police officers, some of whom appeared to be holding images of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, kept the demonstrators at a distance from the embassy building.</p> <p>State television said some clerics held similar protests in the shrine city of Qom, the center of religious learning in Iran.</p>

Iranian parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf on Sunday linked the French magazine's cartoons with what officials have repeatedly alleged is the West's plot to spread purported riots in Iran.

Later in the day, President Ebrahim Raisi offered his first reaction to the French cartoons and echoed similar claims. "Resorting to insults on the pretext of freedom is a clear indication of their frustration in concluding plot for chaos and insecurity" in Iran, he said.

Charlie Hebdo has a long history of publishing vulgar cartoons mocking Islamists, which critics say are deeply insulting to Muslims. Two French-born al-Qaida extremists attacked the newspaper's office in 2015, killing 12 cartoonists, and it has been the target of other attacks over the years.

Its latest issue features the winners of a recent cartoon contest in which entrants were asked to draw the most offensive caricatures of Supreme Leader Khamenei.

One of the finalists depicts a turbaned cleric reaching for a hangman's noose as he drowns in blood, while another shows Khamenei clinging to a giant throne above the raised fists of protesters. Others depict more vulgar and sexually explicit scenes.

Anti-government protests erupted across Iran in September after the death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman who had been detained by the country's morality police for allegedly violating its strict Islamic dress code.

The unrest has grown into one of the severest challenges to the Islamic Republic since the 1979 revolution that brought it to power. Human rights groups say that at least 517 protesters have been killed and over 19,200 people have been arrested amid a violent crackdown by security forces. Iranian authorities have not provided an official count of those killed or detained.

On Saturday, authorities executed two men convicted of allegedly killing a paramilitary volunteer in the demonstrations.

The Saturday hangings brought to four the number of people known to have been executed since the unrest began in September over the death of Amini. All of the sentences were handed out in rapid, closed-door trials that have been met with international criticism.

Sunday was also the third anniversary of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's downing of an Ukrainian passenger plane with two surface-to-air missiles, killing all 176 people on board — a tragedy that ignited an outburst of anger across Iran. Tehran initially denied responsibility for downing the plane before admitting to having mistakenly done so amid high tensions with the U.S.

An Iranian court has yet to issue a verdict three years into the trial of 10 military personnel who have not been publicly identified but are allegedly implicated in the plane's downing.

Families of the victims met on Sunday at the site of the crash to hold a memorial ceremony separately from an official commemoration organized at Tehran's international airport, which had been the point of departure for the flight.

In a separate development on Sunday, a court sentenced Faezeh Hashemi, daughter of former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, to a five-year prison term for "propaganda against the system," Iranian media reported.

The outspoken and pro-reform Hashemi has been in prison since late September after she was arrested by security forces for supporting protests that have been led by women opposing the mandatory headscarf or hijab under the Islamic Republic.

In 2011, Hashemi was convicted and served five years in prison over similar security charges.



	<p>Iranian officials have continued to claim the months-long protests are being driven by foreign agents but have offered no proof.</p> <p>Following Charlie Hebdo's publishing of cartoons mocking Iranian clerical figures, authorities in Tehran shut down on Thursday a decades-old French research institute and called the closure a “first step” in their response.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 China holds large-scale joint strike drills</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/china-holds-large-scale-joint-strike-drills-aimed-96305979">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/china-holds-large-scale-joint-strike-drills-aimed-96305979</a>
GIST	<p>TAIPEI, Taiwan -- The Chinese military held large-scale joint combat strike drills starting Sunday, sending war planes and navy vessels toward Taiwan, both the Chinese and Taiwanese defense ministries said.</p> <p>The exercises coincided with the visit of a group of German lawmakers who landed in Taiwan on Monday morning. Leading the delegation is the Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, who leads the German Parliament’s Defense Committee.</p> <p>The German lawmakers will meet with Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen, as well as Taiwan’s National Security Council head and the Mainland Affairs Council, which handles issues related to China.</p> <p>China has stepped up its pressure on Taiwan’s military in recent years by sending warplanes or navy vessels on an almost-daily basis toward the self-ruled island. China claims sovereignty over the island, which split from the mainland in 1949 after a civil war.</p> <p>Sunday's exercises have continued into Monday, Taiwan’s defense ministry said, monitoring Chinese warplanes and navy vessels on its missile systems.</p> <p>China’s actions “have severely disrupted the peace and stability in the Taiwan Straits and surrounding waters,” the ministry said.</p> <p>Over the course of 24 hours between 6 a.m. Sunday to 6 a.m. Monday morning, China's People's Liberation Army flew 57 warplanes and four ships toward Taiwan, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense said in a statement Monday morning. Twenty-eight of those planes crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait, an unofficial boundary that both sides had previously stood by.</p> <p>China announced the drills around 11 p.m. Sunday, saying their “primary target was to practice land-strikes and sea assaults,” according to a statement from Shi Yi, a spokesperson for the PLA's Eastern Theater Command.</p> <p>At the end of December, China sent a record 71 planes and 7 ships toward Taiwan, the largest such scale exercise in 2022.</p> <p>Taiwan will hold its annual two-day military drills starting Wednesday. The exercise ahead of Lunar New Year holidays is aimed at showcasing its defense capabilities.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 New border strategy crackdown</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/explaining-bidens-new-border-strategy-expelling-migrants-expanding/story?id=96251706">https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/explaining-bidens-new-border-strategy-expelling-migrants-expanding/story?id=96251706</a>
GIST	The Biden administration last week <a href="#">announced a significant new crackdown</a> on unauthorized migration at the border while opening new legal pathways for some people to enter the U.S

At issue once again [is Title 42](#), a decades-old public health law that was first used by the Trump administration in the wake of COVID-19 to initiate restrictions on humanitarian protections and quickly expel migrants.

While the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention attempted last year to rescind the border expulsion order, a federal judge in Louisiana kept it in place -- and then [the Supreme Court agreed to hear an appeal](#) from mostly GOP-led states, stopping another federal judge's ruling that Title 42 had to end in December.

The government under President Joe Biden [has both defended and been critical of Title 42](#), but officials now say they must enforce it while the legal battles play out even as Biden said last week, "I don't like Title 42."

The plan announced last week will utilize Title 42 and other methods like the standard authority under Title 8 to send as many as 30,000 unauthorized Haitians, Cubans, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans to Mexico each month.

At the same time, the Department of Homeland Security is expanding a parole program to allow up to 30,000 migrants per month to seek asylum as long as they meet specific criteria. Applicants will need sponsorship in the U.S. and are required to pass background checks. Those who cross into the U.S. illegally will be disqualified.

"What we heard today was a major expansion of enforcement at the border but, at the same time, the creation of some legal pathways for people to come into the country lawfully and some ways of applying for an asylum appointment ahead of time as well," said Andrew Selee, president of the nonpartisan Migration Policy Institute.

Diplomatic tensions and logistical challenges have prevented the return of many Cubans, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans to their home countries. The new agreement with Mexico will allow for more of them to be swiftly returned across the border as long as the Title 42 order remains in place, pending a Supreme Court decision. (Arguments before the court are scheduled for February.)

While the move was met with criticism from both sides of the political spectrum -- Sen. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., called it a "disastrous and inhumane relic" -- Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas [said Sunday on ABC's "This Week"](#) that the immigration system is constrained by Congress' inability to pass bigger changes.

The Department of Homeland Security intends to implement the newly announced migrant removal plan even if Title 42 ends, officials said Thursday.

However, some experts say using standard immigration processes to return non-Mexicans to Mexico could be difficult and will require full cooperation with the Mexican government -- a topic that is likely to arise when [Biden meets with Andrés Manuel López Obrador](#) for a summit this week.

"It is going to be a little more complicated because Mexico would have to sign an actual agreement with the United States to take people back under Title 8, which was the regular way of returning people," Selee, with the Migration Policy Institute, told ABC News. "But it is possible to do that."

Mexico has opposed so-called "safe third country" agreements to take migrants in the past and was reluctant to cooperate even with admitting migrants temporarily under the "remain in Mexico" protocols begun under the Trump administration. But throughout the pandemic, Mexico has taken back some non-Mexican migrants, primarily from northern Central American countries.

The U.S. conducted nearly 345,000 expulsions of El Salvadorans, Guatemalans and Hondurans in fiscal year 2022. The vast majority were sent back to Mexico, one U.S. official said.

Small numbers of Cubans, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans had also been returned to Mexico prior to last week's announcement, according to two U.S. officials.

Despite the potential diplomatic and legal complications that could prevent deportations, Mayorkas said Thursday that the administration intends to use standard immigration processing under Title 8 of U.S. law to return unauthorized Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans once Title 42 ends.

"The longevity of these programs is something that, of course, depends on what we are experiencing at the border and the dynamism, as I mentioned, of the migration challenge that is gripping this hemisphere -- and quite frankly, the entire world," Mayorkas said. "With respect to Mexico, Mexico makes its independent decisions with respect to the needs it must address through the mechanisms it has available to it."

Immigrant advocates remain concerned that the Biden administration's new plan will effectively result in an expansion of the Title 42 order for Cubans, Haitians and Nicaraguans, curtailing their access to asylum and other humanitarian protections due to the swift nature of the removal process.

Eleanor Acer, senior director Human Rights First, said the strategy signified a "doubling down on cruel and counterproductive policies" from the Trump administration.

"Every day that these policies are in place, people seeking refuge will be turned away to suffer horrific abuses," Acer said in a statement. "This subversion of human rights and refugee law is a stain on the record of President Biden and his administration that will inflict indelible harm on human lives, human rights, and the refugee protection system globally."

While the Trump administration did attempt to strong-arm Mexico into accepting more migrants, there are significant distinctions with the Biden administration's approach, such as the pairing of parole options and a commitment to tripling refugee admissions from the Western Hemisphere over the next year.

"I think we have to see the details before we know -- there are certainly echoes of what we saw during the Trump administration, even if it's not exactly the same policy," Selee said.

There are limited exceptions made for those who might be subjected to the Title 42 order, including those deemed "particularly vulnerable" by the Department of Homeland Security.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/07 Global food prices hit record high in 2022
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-inflation-health-business-climate-and-environment-00539505ec5db37de5877137b9febeb8">https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-inflation-health-business-climate-and-environment-00539505ec5db37de5877137b9febeb8</a>
GIST	<p>ROME (AP) — Global prices for food commodities like grain and vegetable oils were the highest on record last year even after falling for nine months in a row, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization said, as <a href="#">Russia's war in Ukraine</a>, drought and other factors <a href="#">drove up inflation and worsened hunger worldwide</a>.</p> <p>The FAO Food Price Index, which tracks monthly changes in the international prices of commonly traded food commodities, dipped by 1.9% in December from a month earlier, the Rome-based organization said Friday. For the whole year, it averaged 143.7 points, more than 14% above the 2021 average, which also saw large increases.</p> <p>The December decline was led by a drop in the price of vegetable oils amid shrinking import demand, expectations of increased soy oil production in South America and lower crude oil prices. Grain and meat were also down, while dairy and sugar rose slightly.</p> <p>"Calmer food commodity prices are welcome after <a href="#">two very volatile years</a>," FAO chief economist Maximo Torero said in a prepared statement. "It is important to remain vigilant and keep a strong focus on</p>

mitigating global food insecurity given that world food prices remain at elevated levels, with many staples near record highs, and with prices of rice increasing, and still many risks associated with future supplies.”

Last year, the U.N. organization’s Food Price Index hit the highest level since its records began in 1961, according to FAO data.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February [exacerbated a food crisis](#) because the two countries were [leading global suppliers of wheat](#), barley, [sunflower oil](#) and other products, especially to nations in parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia that were already struggling with hunger.

With critical Black Sea supplies disrupted, [food prices rose to record highs](#), increasing inflation, poverty and food insecurity in [developing nations that rely on imports](#).

The war also jolted energy markets and [fertilizer supplies](#), both key to food production. That was on top of [climate shocks that have fueled starvation](#) in places like the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya are badly affected by the [worst drought in decades](#), with the U.N. warning that [parts of Somalia are facing famine](#). Thousands of people have already died.

Prices for wheat and corn reached a record high last year, though they fell in December along with the costs of other grains, the FAO said. It said harvests in the Southern Hemisphere boosted supplies and there was strong competition among exporters.

The organization’s Vegetable Oil Price Index hit an all-time high last year, even as it tumbled in December to its lowest level since February 2021. For all of 2022, the FAO Dairy Price Index and Meat Price Index also were the highest since 1990.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 Marches in Europe support Iran protests</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/iran-protests-and-demonstrations-lyon-government-europe-fbb04874d6e3207224b17778e47c94ec">https://apnews.com/article/iran-protests-and-demonstrations-lyon-government-europe-fbb04874d6e3207224b17778e47c94ec</a>
GIST	<p>LYON, France (AP) — Hundreds of people marched Sunday in France to honor <a href="#">an Iranian Kurdish man who took his own life</a> in a desperate act of anguish over <a href="#">the nationwide protests in Iran</a>.</p> <p>French police estimated the size of the crowd that gathered for Mohammad Moradi at about 1,000 people. They marched in the city of Lyon, where the 38-year-old Moradi took his own life in December, drowning in the Rhone river.</p> <p>In videos in Farsi and French recorded before his death, Moradi criticized Iran’s leadership and called for solidarity from Western governments against it. The recordings featured him saying, “When you see this video, I will be dead.”</p> <p>The protesters Sunday marched with placards that read “stop executions in Iran” and other slogans. Some traveled from other parts of France.</p> <p>Hundreds of protesters also gathered in Rome and London in support of the Iranian protest movement. Moradi arrived in France in 2019 with his wife and was pursuing a Ph.D. in history. His death resonated among the Iranian diaspora.</p> <p>“Mohammad took his life with incredible courage,” said Lili Mohadjer, one of the Lyon march organizers, who addressed the crowd. “His hope was that the media and Western governments continue to support the Iranian people.”</p> <p>The protests in Iran began in mid-September, over the death of Mahsa Amini. The 22-year-old woman died after being arrested by Iran’s morality police for allegedly <a href="#">violating the Islamic Republic’s strict dress code</a>.</p>

Women have played a leading role in the protests, with many publicly removing the compulsory Islamic headscarf, known as the hijab.

Sunday's marchers in Lyon shouted Moradi's name. They also observed a minute of silence for him and for two men that [Iran said it executed on Saturday](#) for allegedly killing a paramilitary volunteer during a demonstration.

Iran's judiciary identified those executed as Mohammad Mehdi Karami and Mohammad Hosseini, making it four men known to have been executed since the demonstrations began in September. All have faced internationally criticized, rapid, closed-door trials.

The Lyon marchers also paid homage to victims of [the shooting down of a Ukrainian passenger plane in 2020](#) that killed 176 people. Iran's military mistakenly downed Ukraine International Airlines Flight PS752 with two surface-to-air missiles.

In London, protesters waved Iran's pre-revolutionary flag as they marched to Trafalgar Square and carried banners with pictures of demonstrators killed by the Islamic Republic's authorities. They chanted "woman, life, freedom," a slogan of the Iranian movement.

Outside the Iranian Embassy in Rome, demonstrators chanted "killers!" and stacked up boxes outside its closed doors containing signed petitions.

The Turin daily La Stampa spearheaded the collection of 300,000 signatures against what it decried as "unjust incarcerations, torture, death sentences of those in Iran demonstrating peacefully to change their own country."

Turin and other Italian cities and towns also saw protests against Iran's crackdown.

Among the demonstrators in Rome was opposition lawmaker Mara Carfagna. In a tweet, Carfagna decried the death sentences and "the brutal repression against women and young people." She asked Premier Giorgia Meloni to press for a European Union initiative when the Italian leader meets in Rome on Monday with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 New Western firepower outguns Russia</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11611463/New-Western-firepower-outgunning-Putin-Russian-raw-recruits-losing-Ukraines-modern-tech.html">https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11611463/New-Western-firepower-outgunning-Putin-Russian-raw-recruits-losing-Ukraines-modern-tech.html</a>
GIST	<p>A military expert says it is 'perfectly possible for Ukraine to win the war this year' if its military science continues to outmatch that of Russia.</p> <p>Ever since <a href="#">Putin's invasion of Ukraine</a> on February 24 last year, President Volodymyr <a href="#">Zelensky</a> has successfully lobbied Western allies for modern armoured vehicles to repel the occupiers.</p> <p>Through the course of the conflict, Ukraine has gradually surpassed its invaders with technology allowing for a devastating fightback.</p> <p>On New Year's Eve, a volley of American-manufactured HIMARS rocket launchers struck a building filled with Russian conscripts in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region.</p> <p>The strike, upon the poorly fortified <a href="#">Professional Technical School in Makiivka</a>, killed 89 Russian recruits according to the Kremlin and destroyed their ammunition, The Guardian reports.</p> <p>The Kremlin confirmed the loss of life and <a href="#">blamed its soldiers' use of mobile phones</a> for giving away the location. Ukraine considers the probable death toll to be higher - possibly in the hundreds.</p>

The incident has provoked widespread anger in Russia, where [support for the war is waning](#), while it may signal to Putin the need for improved military organisation and development.

Last week, Ukraine was handed a further lifeline when France, Germany and the US all agreed to send versions of their tanks, the AMX-10, the Marder and the Bradley.

Although not classified as 'true tanks' because of their lack of armour or firepower, the weapons are capable of providing firing support to Ukrainians advancing across enemy lines.

Among those machines, the US Bradley - which served with distinction in the 1991 Gulf War - is widely regarded the most advanced, boasting a 25mm cannon fired from a chain gun and a pod on the side - effective at wiping out Russian battle tanks.

Germany is still holding back on Ukrainian demands to supply the lethal Leopard-II, a 63-ton battle tank that some think could shift the course of the war.

Ben Barry, senior fellow of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, said the Leopard can be acquired in a package with its own recovery vehicles, with low loaders and rail capability, The Telegraph reports.

'In terms of military science, it is perfectly possible for Ukraine to win the war this year,' said Mr Watling. 'There are other plausible scenarios - what if Russian military industry gets its act together and increases munitions production? What if the Russians sort out their training?'

Mr Barry, who himself served in Bosnia and had a number of the vehicles under his command, described the German Marder as 'respectable but old' and added that the AMX-10 has an armour too thin to be a true tank but it possesses great speed.

He added: 'If someone said to me, "Ben, I want you to build an armoured brigade, would you like these things?" I'd say, "absolutely". They are just what you want for a reconnaissance echelon or rapid reaction force.'

The head of the Ukrainian military, Valery Zaluzhny, says he needs 300 tanks, 600 to 700 infantry fighting vehicles and 500 howitzers to push Russia back to its lines before the invasion.

France has not confirmed the number of AMX-10s it will send, while German newspaper Der Spiegel reported about 40 Marders - the equivalent of a battalion - are likely to be sent.

US officials are reported to have said they will supply 50 Bradleys in the next support package to Ukraine.

Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki yesterday stated he was in talks with coalition countries to discuss the prospect of sending Leopard-II tanks to Ukraine.

Thanks to a 'combined arms' approach - utilising intelligence with airpower, missiles and small, flexible armed units - Ukraine was able to stave off the the first wave of the invasion.

They were able to access Elon Musk's satellite system, providing general with an immeasurable tool for strategy - with instant connection from headquarters to the trenches.

Writing for the Guardian, Michael Clarke a professor of defence studies at Kings College London, said: 'Kyiv still has some way to go before it has enough equipment and troops to conduct the sort of offensive that will throw Russian forces out of most, or all, its territory.'

'It needs a lot more of what it already has - and then more overtly offensive weapon systems, including heavier armoured forces, more attack aircraft and more drones and missiles.'



	<p>The ineptitude of the Russian army, vast in number and run centrally, was exposed early in the war.</p> <p>Prof Clarke added: 'The re-mobilised Russian army will have to be less corrupt, a characteristic that bedevils the quality and supply of military equipment... Its logistics need to be modernised quickly. Food and ammunition supply is particularly acute.'</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 Public schools losing students</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.axios.com/2023/01/08/public-school-enrollment-decline">https://www.axios.com/2023/01/08/public-school-enrollment-decline</a>
GIST	<p>The pandemic has supercharged a trend that has plagued districts across the U.S. for years — students are fleeing public schools.</p> <p><b>Why it matters:</b> Public schools lose funding as they lose students, and some schools have been forced to shutter altogether.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>That disadvantages the many millions of students — typically lower-income students in cities — who can't turn to private schools or homeschooling.</li> </ul> <p><b>By the numbers:</b> Public schools lost more than a million students from fall 2019 to fall 2020, <a href="#">according to the National Center for Education Statistics</a>. Enrollment fell from 50.8 million to 49.4 million.</p> <p><b>What's happening:</b> Over the last decade, a number of states, including Michigan and New Hampshire, saw enrollment fall primarily due to declining birthrates. Others, like Texas, saw numbers rise due to immigration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Then the pandemic hit, and public schools were subjected to state and local guidelines. Many of them flip-flopped on virtual versus in-person learning.</li> <li>Widespread teacher and staff shortages exacerbated the problem. <a href="#">Students rapidly fell behind</a>. That pushed frustrated parents to pull their kids out.</li> <li>As a result, <a href="#">private schools</a> and <a href="#">charter schools</a> gained students. The number of homeschooled students <a href="#">doubled</a> to about 5 million.</li> </ul> <p><b>Zoom in:</b> Districts from coast to coast are responding to the exodus by shuttering entire schools, <i>The Wall Street Journal</i> <a href="#">reports</a>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"The school board in Jefferson County, Colo., outside Denver, voted in November to close 16 schools. St. Paul, Minn., last summer closed five schools. The Oakland, Calif., school board last February <a href="#">voted to close</a> seven schools after years of declining enrollment and financial strife."</li> </ul> <p><b>Major metropolitan areas</b> have been hit the hardest. A Wall Street Journal analysis found "enrollment fell in roughly 85 of the nation's largest 100 public-school districts."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enrollment in New York City's public schools, the country's largest school district, dropped by 8.3% from 2020 to 2022, <a href="#">according to a fiscal watchdog</a> funded by the city.</li> <li>Charter school enrollment in NYC increased roughly 7.8% over the same period.</li> <li>It <a href="#">may take years</a> for some students to recover from pandemic-era learning loss, according to a <a href="#">report from NWEA</a>, a nonprofit group that administers standardized tests.</li> </ul> <p><b>What to watch:</b> The federal government projects public school enrollment will fall even further — to 47.3 million — by 2030. Even the districts that have seen rising numbers in recent years are expected to shed students.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 California braces for more rough weather</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.usnews.com/news/top-news/articles/2023-01-08/storm-in-california-leaves-over-330-000-without-power-more-rough-weather-ahead">https://www.usnews.com/news/top-news/articles/2023-01-08/storm-in-california-leaves-over-330-000-without-power-more-rough-weather-ahead</a>
GIST	(Reuters) -Torrential downpours and damaging winds left hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses without power in California early on Sunday as the area braced for the next onslaught of severe weather.

	<p>More than 560,000 homes were reported to be still without power in California as of 0506 ET (1006 GMT), according to data from PowerOutage.us.</p> <p>At least six people have died in the severe weather since New Year's weekend, including a toddler killed by a fallen redwood tree crushing a mobile home in northern California.</p> <p>Forecasters have meanwhile warned yet another "atmospheric river" of dense, moist tropical air will clobber California on Monday with rain and mountain snow.</p> <p>An NWS weather alert on Saturday warned that the cumulative effect of successive heavy rain storms since late December could bring rivers to record high levels and cause flooding across much of Central California.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 Russia claims hundreds of Ukrainians killed</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/moscow-ends-self-proclaimed-ceasefire-vows-press-ahead-ukraine-2023-01-08/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/moscow-ends-self-proclaimed-ceasefire-vows-press-ahead-ukraine-2023-01-08/</a>
GIST	<p>KRAMATORSK, Ukraine, Jan 8 (Reuters) - A Russian rocket strike on the Ukrainian city of Kramatorsk caused damage but did not destroy buildings and there were no obvious signs of casualties, a Reuters witness said on Sunday, after Russia said the attack killed 600 Ukrainian soldiers.</p> <p>Reuters reporters visited the two college dormitories Russia's defence ministry said had been temporarily housing Ukrainian servicemen close to the front line of the war at the time of the overnight strike. Neither appeared to have been directly hit by missiles or seriously damaged. There were no obvious signs that soldiers had been living there and no sign of bodies or traces of blood.</p> <p>Some of the windows were broken at Hostel No. 47, which stood by a courtyard that had a big crater in it.</p> <p>The other building named by Russia's defence ministry, Hostel No. 28, was entirely intact. A crater lay about 50 metres away closer to some garages.</p> <p>Authorities in Kyiv did not immediately comment on the strike or on Russia's claim of hundreds of casualties. Kramatorsk's mayor earlier said there had been no casualties.</p> <p>Russia's defence ministry, in a statement, said the strike on the buildings in Kramatorsk was a revenge operation for a deadly Ukrainian attack last week on a Russian barracks in Makiivka, in part of the Donetsk region controlled by Moscow's forces, in which at least 89 servicemen were killed.</p> <p>It said Moscow had used what it called reliable intelligence to target the Ukrainian troops. More than 700 Ukrainian troops had been housed in one hostel and more than 600 in another, it said.</p> <p>"As a result of a massive missile strike on these temporary deployment points of Ukrainian army units, more than 600 Ukrainian servicemen were destroyed," the defence ministry said.</p> <p>If true, it would be the single largest loss of Ukrainian troops since Russia invaded on Feb. 24 last year. Neither side in the grinding war, now in its eleventh month, usually disclose losses.</p> <p>Pavlo Kyrylenko, Ukraine's governor of Donetsk, had said earlier that Russia had launched seven missile strikes on Kramatorsk.</p> <p>And Oleksandr Honcharenko, Kramatorsk's mayor, said earlier on Sunday that the attack had damaged two educational facilities and eight apartment buildings and garages but that there had been no casualties.</p>

	<p>Ukraine was believed to have stopped housing troops close together in single facilities after a deadly Russian missile strike on a base in western Ukraine in March which killed dozens.</p> <p>The practice of housing soldiers all together came into focus too after the Ukrainian strike on Makiivka this month with Russian military commanders subject to fierce criticism inside Russia for not dispersing their forces.</p> <p>Russia has repeatedly shelled Kramatorsk, which is also in the Donetsk region, one of four regions Moscow claims to have formally incorporated into Russia, something Ukraine and most countries in the world do not recognise.</p> <p>Kramatorsk lies a few miles northwest of Bakhmut, a small city which Russia has been trying to take for more than five months in a brutal battle which has become the scene of some of the fiercest fighting in recent weeks.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials earlier said at least two people had been killed elsewhere in Russian overnight bombing after a unilateral Russian Orthodox Christmas ceasefire had expired.</p> <p>A 50-year-old man had been killed in the northeastern region of Kharkiv, Oleh Synehubov, the governor of the region, said on the Telegram messaging app.</p> <p>Another person had been killed in overnight attack on Soledar, close to Bakhmut in the Donetsk region, local officials said.</p> <p>Reuters could not immediately verify those claims.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Florida: migrant surge state of emergency</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2023/01/07/Ron-Desantis-migrants-florida-state-of-emergency/4311673108707/">https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2023/01/07/Ron-Desantis-migrants-florida-state-of-emergency/4311673108707/</a>
GIST	<p>Jan. 7 (UPI) -- Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has declared a state of emergency and called out the national guard to deal with an influx of Cuban and Haitian migrants in the southern part of the state.</p> <p>DeSantis said Friday the migrants have overwhelmed local authorities and the state will deploy air assets, including airplanes and helicopters from the Florida National Guard, to bolster existing Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission marine patrol units.</p> <p>Under the state of emergency, some DeSantis administration officials will have the authority to suspend the effect of any state law, rule or order that may block them from responding to the situation.</p> <p>In declaring the emergency, DeSantis -- considered a frontrunner for the Republican Party's presidential nomination in 2024 -- blamed the Biden administration for the situation.</p> <p>"As the negative impacts of Biden's lawless immigration policies continue unabated, the burden of the Biden administration's failure falls on local law enforcement who lack the resources to deal with the crisis," he asserted. "When Biden continues to ignore his legal responsibilities, we will step into support our communities."</p> <p>Since Oct. 1, authorities have stopped more than 4,000 Cuban migrants at sea, a significant increase from the 838 who were intercepted in fiscal year 2021, according to the U.S. Coast Guard.</p> <p>In the past two days alone more than 500 Cuban immigrants have traveled to the Florida Keys and more than 100 Haitians have landed in Key Largo, Politico reported.</p>

	<p>On Thursday, Biden announced a new policy allowing 30,000 immigrants a month from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela to enter the country in a bid to reduce unauthorized entries.</p> <p>Monroe County Sheriff Rick Ramsay said he'd been in frequent contact with the governor before DeSantis issued the executive order.</p> <p>"This is a crisis for us," Ramsay told the Miami Herald. "So far, definitely the state of Florida has been amazing and they stepped up and have been very responsive."</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/06 CDC: Covid, flu continue to cause misery</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.upi.com/Health_News/2023/01/06/influenza-COVID-19-tracking/9851673032187/">https://www.upi.com/Health_News/2023/01/06/influenza-COVID-19-tracking/9851673032187/</a>
GIST	<p>Jan. 6 (UPI) -- <a href="#">COVID-19</a> hospitalizations continue to steadily rise across the United States, the Omicron subvariant XBB.1.5 is "spreading quickly" and at least 22 million Americans have gotten the flu, federal health officials said Friday.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also estimates that so far this season, at least 230,000 hospitalizations and 14,000 deaths from influenza have occurred.</p> <p>Nationwide, 13 influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported this week, for a total of 74 pediatric flu deaths reported this season, according to the agency.</p> <p>Seasonal flu activity "remains high but continues to decline in most areas," with eight state/jurisdictions reporting moderate activity and 39 reporting high or very high activity, said the CDC, which regularly <a href="#">tracks COVID-19</a> and <a href="#">flu</a>.</p> <p>But the agency on Friday backed off its recent forecast that the <a href="#">highly transmissible</a> Omicron variant XBB.1.5 comprises an estimated 41% of all circulating variants, putting the revised figure at 27.6%.</p> <p>The CDC said its "Nowcast" estimates aren't real-time counts of COVID-19 variants, but instead are based on modeling since it takes two to three weeks to collect and analyze samples.</p> <p>Still, only the Omicron subvariant BQ.1.1 has a higher share, at 34.4% of all circulating COVID-19 variants, as of Friday, the agency said.</p> <p>Nationwide, 470,699 weekly cases of COVID-19 were reported, according to the CDC's latest data, for the week ended Wednesday. Total cases since the pandemic began now top 101 million.</p> <p>While there's been an upward trend since CDC's Oct. 19 report of 260,450 weekly cases of the coronavirus, the current figure is well below the 1.6 million weekly cases reported in early January 2021 or the nearly 4.1 million cases reported in early January 2022.</p> <p>Weekly U.S. deaths from COVID-19 stood at 2,731, the latest data show. That's roughly one-tenth of such deaths at the peak in January 2021.</p> <p>Total U.S. deaths from COVID-19 have now topped 1 million.</p> <p>Nationwide, 6,528 new admissions of patients with confirmed COVID-19 were reported for the week ended Wednesday, mostly among people over age 70.</p> <p>While 85.4% of the U.S. population aged 5 years and above, or nearly 267 million people, have gotten at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, CDC says percentage drops to 15.4%, or 48 million Americans, who have received the updated bivalent booster dose available to adults since September.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 UNHCR decries US border measures</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/border-security/un-agency-condemns-new-u-s-border-measures/">https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/border-security/un-agency-condemns-new-u-s-border-measures/</a>
GIST	<p>Plans by the Biden administration to expand restrictions on people seeking refuge in the United States are “not in line with refugee law standards”, the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, said on Friday.</p> <p>UNHCR says that according to reports, the reforms would deny migrants the chance to seek asylum in the U.S. if they crossed from Mexico into the U.S. without permission.</p> <p>But President Biden also said that up to 30,000 people per month from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela could come legally, if they meet a series of requirements, including finding a sponsor and demonstrate they are able to afford a plane ticket.</p> <p>UNHCR spokesperson Boris Cheshirkov told journalists in Geneva that while the UN agency welcomed the expanded safe and regular pathways for entry to the U.S. for some, the new measures “must not preclude people forced to flee from exercising their fundamental human right to seek safety”.</p> <p>Due to the “multi-faceted” nature of the Administration’s announcement, UNHCR is seeking additional details and analyzing the likely impact of the measures, said Mr. Cheshirkov, which would enable an “unprecedented number of people” from the four nationalities to enter.</p> <p>In addition to considering the wellbeing of thousands already on the move from Latin and Central America, the agency raised its concern over the expansion of the controversial COVID pandemic emergency “Title 42” health restrictions order, to expel Cubans, Haitians, and Nicaraguans without weighing the dangers they were fleeing or the risks and hardships many of them will face in Mexico.</p> <p>UNHCR had made continuous calls for it to be lifted, and the issue has provoked a major court battle in the U.S., with the Supreme Court ruling at the end of December that the policy allowing migrants to be turned away at the border on health grounds, should remain for now.</p> <p>“What we are reiterating is that this is not in line with refugee law standards and that to establish a link between safe and legal pathways which have been announced and of course we welcome the expansion of those on one side that are accessible for some people with curtailment for the right to seek asylum for many more who are ineligible for these pathways”, said Mr. Cheshirkov.</p> <p>Seeking asylum is a fundamental human right, the agency stressed. UNHCR will continue to engage with the U.S. and other governments, to expand safe pathways and develop protection and solutions for asylum seekers – in line with international standards, the Spokesperson said.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 FEMA: escalating range of disasters</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/featured/preparedness-concerns-weigh-on-communities-in-fema-report-outlining-escalating-range-of-disasters/">https://www.hstoday.us/featured/preparedness-concerns-weigh-on-communities-in-fema-report-outlining-escalating-range-of-disasters/</a>
GIST	<p>Communities weighing their disaster readiness in the face of an escalating threat landscape have the greatest concerns about cyber and pandemic vulnerabilities and report the need to make greater strides in preparedness areas including critical infrastructure security plan updates and ensuring medical care and business continuity, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s National Preparedness Report.</p> <p>“Emergency management cannot be reactionary in today’s environment,” FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell wrote at the outset of the report. “Climate change directly impacts the frequency and intensity of natural disasters and our ability to ensure the safety of our communities. Building community-wide resilience to climate change through targeted mitigation investments and leveraging future risk data needs to be a primary focus for all levels of government and partners.”</p>

“Though this entails higher costs for everyone, the consequences of inaction are far more severe,” she added, stressing that public-private partnerships and increased information-sharing across critical infrastructure sectors “remains pivotal to reducing risk to aging infrastructure systems and building resilience to all hazards, including cyberattacks.”

In 2021 the country experienced 20 weather-related disasters, resulting in 688 fatalities and cumulatively costing \$145 billion. That far outpaces the average from 1980–2021, the report notes, with 7.4 incidents billion-dollar disasters per year.

Most communities in 2021 overwhelmingly identified cyberattacks and pandemics as the threat and hazard types they believe are most likely to occur and put the most stress on their capabilities, followed by flooding, active shooters, explosives or earthquakes, hurricanes or wildfires, winter storms, chemical security incidents, and tornadoes.

Ninety-five percent of communities reported natural hazards as likely to occur and 92 percent of communities reported hazards that can be exacerbated by climate change as most stressful to their emergency management capabilities, the report said, adding that climate change “will dramatically change communities’ risk outlooks in the coming decades.”

The report notes that extreme heat is now one of the deadliest types of weather incidents, causing more fatalities in the U.S. than incidents of hurricanes, tornadoes, or flooding — with vulnerable populations disproportionately affected. “Heat fatalities have outpaced hurricane fatalities by a significant margin in recent decades,” the report states. “The 30-year average indicates heat was responsible for just over three times the number of fatalities caused by hurricanes. The 10-year and 2021 averages for heat-related fatalities are eight times more than hurricanes.”

Another risk noted by FEMA is the projection that sea level along the U.S. coastline will rise, on average, 10-12 inches between 2020 and 2050, contributing to five times as many more flooding disasters by 2050 than today. And over the past four decades, windstorms caused more than \$1 trillion in economic damages, making wind the country’s costliest loss-producing natural hazard. The risk of tornadoes in “Tornado Alley” — regions in Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas that have typically experienced lots of twisters — has shifted, with activity increasing in Southeastern states like Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and Missouri.

In California, 10 of the costliest wildfires in loss of life and property occurred after 2015, “mirroring the rise in global temperatures and severe droughts,” FEMA stressed. “Between 1979 and 2020, human-driven climate change was the main driver of fire weather in this region, causing twice as many fires beyond regularly observed variability.”

“The increased severity, duration, and occurrence rate of climate-related disasters puts immense strain on emergency responders,” the report states. “It continues to cause delays in recovery efforts, which can take weeks, months, or even decades.”

FEMA emphasized the risk to critical infrastructure security from cyber incidents — including the 2021 attacks on the Oldsmar, Fla., water supply and Colonial Pipeline — as well as from a changing climate, noting that “between the 2000s and the 2010s, the U.S. saw a 67 percent increase in significant power outages due to weather-related incidents.”

“As climate change causes natural disasters to increase in frequency, the likelihood that a cyberattack will coincide with another disaster grows, becoming a major area of concern for communities across the nation,” the report notes. “Such a cyberattack during or immediately after a natural disaster or terrorism-related incident could create a ‘domino effect,’ leading to losses of electrical power, water, telecommunications, and other infrastructure that could hamper response efforts and imperil survivors depending on the nature of the disaster.”



In 2021, communities “overall reported being relatively close to achieving their target goals” in attaining emergency capabilities, with communities reporting that they were closest to their goals in intelligence cycle auditing/execution, unified operations, threat and hazard modeling, supply chain risk preparedness, and information delivery. Areas in which they were furthest from their goals, from highest to lowest achievement and often blamed on having limited staff, were in reopening businesses, critical infrastructure security plan updates, body recovery/storage, medical care, and cyber plan updates.

“Targeted investments — particularly those that harden critical infrastructure and create redundancies — are one of the best ways communities can mitigate the impact of future disasters and adapt to the effects of a changing climate,” the report said, detailing avenues for assistance including sources funded under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Leveraging data “to help anticipate and prepare for future climate change impacts” is critical for communities, the report emphasizes. “Along with mitigation projects targeting climate change impacts, communities can invest in mitigation measures to reduce the risk exposure of the nation’s critical infrastructure to physical and technological threats and hazards, including earthquakes, solar weather, power grid disruptions, and cyber threats,” it states. “...Communities can reduce their vulnerability by improving the resilience of these interconnected systems and structures and can leverage existing funding sources available through federal grants to achieve this goal.”

The report also advocates building public-private partnerships “to develop and complete physical projects and for information sharing and planning before, during, and after disasters” and to “help address specific areas of concern and promote community resilience to various threats and hazards.”

“Private capital is vital for boosting investments in risk mitigation measures such as sustainable energy transitions and critical infrastructure updates,” FEMA said. “While developing new and innovative resiliency-building strategies, the private sector can focus on digitalization, decarbonization, and diversification.”

Looking ahead, FEMA plans for the 2023 NPR to include “additional trend analyses of risks across communities, leveraging Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA) data to better understand communities’ most challenging threats and hazards over time, and FEMA’s National Risk Index (NRI) data to examine anticipated disaster-related annual losses.”

“The 2023 report will also leverage data from the National Household Survey (NHS) to show trends in individual and community preparedness and resilience efforts,” FEMA added.

[Return to Top](#)

Click on link for National Preparedness Report 2022: [https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema\\_2022-npr.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_2022-npr.pdf)

HEADLINE	01/07 Tech layoffs, job search competition
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/01/07/tech-layoffs-job-search-competition/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/01/07/tech-layoffs-job-search-competition/</a>
GIST	<p>Although Tiara Richardson read news articles warning of looming Big Tech layoffs, she still hoped her job as a content designer for Meta would be safe. She had been with the company for four months and said, at one point, her team was considered a priority for the company.</p> <p>So when a layoff email hit her inbox back in November, she said she was devastated.</p> <p>Richardson, a 40-year-old in Raleigh, N.C., had been working remote the past four months with a team she enjoyed and just found her stride when she and about <a href="#">11,000 of her colleagues lost their jobs</a>.</p> <p>“I just started bawling,” she said. “I had never been in that position before. ... I started thinking, ‘Oh my God, what if I can’t find a job?’”</p>

Richardson joins hundreds of thousands of tech workers that are in the same boat — unexpectedly out of work and hunting for their next gig. Twitter, Meta, Stripe, Lyft and [most recently Salesforce and Amazon](#) are among some of the most notable companies that [have slashed their workforces](#).

While many laid-off tech workers are finding job openings, they say that there are far fewer and that they're having to combat larger numbers of top talent for new roles. The layoffs aren't deterring workers from the tech industry, several workers say, and they still view tech jobs as opportunities for professional growth and increased earnings. But the cuts are making them look for roles that may offer more job security in the long run.

Data shows the outlook isn't all that gloomy, just yet. Employers added about 223,000 jobs in December, and the unemployment rate fell to a 3.5 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics on Friday. The tech layoffs are not entirely a reflection of economic conditions, Rand Ghayad, head of economics and global labor markets at LinkedIn wrote in a recent blog post. They are, in part, a move to return to more normal hiring.

Richardson posted on LinkedIn a month after being laid off to let her network know she was open to new opportunities. When she started applying for jobs in December and January, she noticed she was competing with hundreds, if not thousands, in her industry for the same positions. (LinkedIn shows how many candidates have applied for the position at the top of job postings.)

"The competition is going to be more fierce," she said. "For the jobs I have applied for, I've gotten more rejection notices than I had previously," she said.

Hiring in the tech, information and media industry is at its lowest level since July 2020, according to LinkedIn's member data. Still, nearly 40 percent of LinkedIn members in the industry who hopped jobs in November stayed in the industry. Others have left for the professional services, like legal or accounting firms, or financial services industries.

The wait for tech workers to get their next gig may not be long, according to October data from ZipRecruiter. About 37 percent of surveyed laid-off tech workers found a new job within one month, and 79 percent were employed within three months.

For Meagan Moakes, getting laid off was unfortunately a familiar experience, but this instance may have come at the worst timing as her husband was laid off two days prior. Moakes, a 37-year-old Dallas resident, has been laid off four times in her career.

"By the fourth time, you're kind of numb to it," Moakes said. "We went from a two-income family to a one-income family to a no-income family within 48 hours."

Moakes said her plight has vastly contrasted that of her husband, who seems to be more in demand as a video game developer. But as someone who has worked in customer relationship roles for big and small tech companies, she's applying for jobs that often have anywhere between 350 to 3,600 other candidates, many from Big Tech companies, she said. As a result, she's starting to doubt her own skills and accomplishments.

"I feel like I'm lost in a sea of numbers," she said.

Vahan Terterian has applied to at least 150 positions since he lost his job in December, but only a handful have responded with interest. The 26-year-old Denver resident was most recently a product manager at rental tech company Nomad, where he worked for seven months before cuts hit.

"I had a sinking feeling in my chest," he recalls thinking about the upcoming layoffs.

After taking a few days to recover from the shock of losing his job, Terterian said he, too, started to realize how many people he's up against for current openings — a much different reality than when he landed his job in May.

"The market is flooded with high-quality talent," he said. "So it seems slower than when I first got this job in May. It was booming [back then]."

Terterian said he's asking hiring employers more specific questions about their financial stability, hiring and outlook to avoid another layoff.

For 36-year-old Amber Adamson, the strategy is to beef up her coding skills to make her more hireable in tech.

Adamson, a Norristown, Penn., resident who's been transitioning out of her teaching role, started her first technical job as a junior email developer for veterinarian services company Covetrus in June but was laid off in September.

She says the barriers are plentiful for new entrants into the industry. First, prerequisites often require years of experience for entry-level positions, she says. Then there are the hundreds of qualified candidates she's competing against. She's seeing more and more laid-off workers from Big Tech companies post that they're available for hire.

"I'm hoping to make myself more desirable for recruiters, so they'll reach out to me," she said. "You really have to be prepared to sell yourself because the market is saturated."

Some workers are finding that the [best path to a new job is through their professional network](#). Charell Star, a former lead of brand media, social media and partnerships at Meta's payments business who's worked in marketing for the last 20 years, was also part of Meta's November layoffs after working for the company for more than two years.

The Maplewood, N.J., resident was four months into her five-month maternity leave. It was the second layoff in her career.

Star said the best leads are coming through connections who either heard about her layoff or saw her LinkedIn post announcing it. She's getting tips on jobs that haven't been posted or roles that have yet to be created, and some of her employed connections are rerouting recruiters to her. So while the layoffs may be increasing competition, they're also creating a sense of community, she says.

"There is a camaraderie of us going through this together," she said. "I recommend people start networking and reaching out to old contacts ... you never know where an opportunity will come from."

Richardson, the former content designer at Meta, said she's getting creative in her job search. With a background in fashion and interests in media, fashion, retail, entertainment and tech, she's contacting her big dream jobs. How big? She said she's contacted the head of human resources at Parkwood Entertainment and Beyoncé Knowles-Carter's company, and approached the Obama Foundation.

"My advice is to keep a positive mind-set, and don't be afraid to shoot your shot," she said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/08 XBB.1.5 variant fuel new Covid wave?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2023/01/08/new-covid-variant-xbb15/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2023/01/08/new-covid-variant-xbb15/</a>
GIST	Three years after the novel coronavirus emerged, a new variant, XBB.1.5, is quickly becoming the dominant strain in parts of the United States because of a potent mix of mutations that makes it easier to spread broadly, including among those who have been previously infected or vaccinated.

XBB.1.5, pegged by the World Health Organization as [“the most transmissible”](#) descendant yet of the [omicron variant](#), rose from barely 2 percent of U.S. cases at the start of December to more than 27 percent the first week of January, according to new [estimates](#) by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

More than 70 percent of cases in the Northeast are believed to be XBB.1.5.

While there is no evidence so far that XBB.1.5 is more virulent than its predecessors, a recent swirl of misinformation linking the rise of new variants to vaccination has cast a spotlight on this latest strain and raised concern among some health experts that it could further limit booster uptake.

“XBB did not evolve because people were vaccinated,” said Vaughn Cooper, a professor of evolutionary biology at the University of Pittsburgh. “The way it evolved, let’s be straight, is because people were infected by multiple viruses at the same time.”

Since the omicron variant ignited an explosion of cases last winter, it spawned a host of descendants that are even more adept at slipping past antibodies and caused most infections in the United States. The XBB line emerged as a result of two other omicron subvariants swapping parts.

Virologists who studied XBB.1.5 say it does not appear better at escaping antibodies than other immune-evading predecessors, but it is better at binding to the cell and replicating. That means it can more easily become the dominant strain in a community than its relatives, but it doesn’t necessarily worsen an individual’s covid symptoms.

Health officials are urging Americans to get a booster dose of the new coronavirus vaccine formulated for omicron subvariants to protect against an [expected winter surge](#) in cases from holiday gatherings and as people continue to congregate indoors.

The nation is averaging nearly 48,000 people hospitalized with covid-19 over a seven-day period, the highest since late February but far below the 150,000 peak set about a year ago. The average daily count of hospitalized patients is up by about 20,000 since Thanksgiving.

But only 15 percent of those eligible — and 38 percent of senior citizens, who are most at risk — have received the updated shots.

“For folks without a very recent infection or a bivalent vaccine, you likely have very little protection against infection. And for older folks, diminishing protection against serious illness,” Ashish Jha, coordinator of the White House’s covid-19 response, tweeted Jan. 4. “So am I concerned about XBB.1.5? Yes. Am I worried this represents some huge set back? No.”

XBB prompted some concerns because of lab studies showing antibodies generated by vaccines struggle to block that variant. But that doesn’t mean the vaccines don’t work: For much of the last year, waves of infections from immune-evading variants have not caused surges of severe illness at hospitals, and experts believe that widespread immunity from shots and prior infections are making people more resilient to the virus.

While antibodies do not provide foolproof shields against reinfections, they still reduce the odds of contracting the virus and greatly reduce the likelihood of severe illness and hospitalization.

“Things like boosters are always beneficial,” said Kristian Andersen, a professor in the department of immunology and microbiology who tracks coronavirus variants at the Scripps Research Institute. “Even if you get infected, you are expected to have less viral load, and you are expected to be able to transmit the virus less.”

But the focus on boosters is also drawing criticism. An opinion piece published in the Wall Street Journal by a member of its editorial board suggested that repeated vaccination made Americans more susceptible to new variants.

Paul Offit, director of the vaccine education center at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, said the risk of mild breakthrough infection has been consistent throughout the pandemic despite the virus's evolution, so there is no reason to blame shots for the variants. But he said it's difficult to justify regular booster shots for the general population when the protection against mild illness is brief and immunity from earlier shots or infections still provides robust protection against severe outcomes.

"At some level, we are going to have to get used to mild illness unless you want to take three doses a year and stay in your house most of the time," said Offit, who also advises the Food and Drug Administration on vaccines.

FDA commissioner Robert Califf, in a series of tweets he said he wrote to address prevalent "misinformation/disinformation," noted that there was no clear evidence to support the thesis of the Wall Street Journal piece.

"Raising doubts about the value of vaccines will continue to lead well-intended people to delay getting an updated vaccine, leading to a clearly documented risk of death or severe illness," Califf tweeted, after Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.); Richard Urso, an ophthalmologist and member of America's Frontline Doctors, a group that spreads covid misinformation; and many others cited the Wall Street Journal piece as they questioned the use of coronavirus vaccines.

Several studies have tried to examine whether SARS-CoV-2 variants spread faster in locations with higher vaccination rates and found no evidence to support it, said Jesse Bloom, an evolutionary biologist at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center in Seattle.

"XBB.1.5 is just sort of the latest variant in what is going to be a continual process of the virus evolving," Bloom said. "There's a lot of space for the virus to get mutations."

While XBB.1.5's mutations have sparked scientific intrigue, experts caution it doesn't substantially change circumstances for ordinary people navigating pandemic life with omicron's descendants as the dominant strains since last spring. In addition to staying up to date on boosters, don't assume you can't get sick again if your last shot or bout with covid was more than several months ago. Wear high-quality masks and avoid crowds to avoid infections that can still cause mild illness, disrupt plans and lead to long-term health complications.

The World Health Organization is monitoring XBB.1.5 because of how quickly it has supplanted other subvariants — and each wave of mass infection brings opportunities for the virus to morph into something more dangerous.

"The more this virus circulates, the more opportunities it will have to change," said Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO's technical lead on covid-19 at a Wednesday news conference. "We do expect further waves of infection around the world but that doesn't have to translate into further waves of death because our countermeasures continue to work."

XBB.1.5 surged first in the Northeast, where it now makes up nearly three quarters of cases. But hospitals there have not raised alarms about people coming in sicker because of the new subvariant.

Official case counts are no longer considered reliable because at-home test results are not reported, but wastewater tracking and other measures suggest cases are rising across the country.

At Northwell Health, New York's largest hospital chain, the ranks of patients testing positive rapidly increased after Thanksgiving, along with the share of viruses confirmed to be the XBB.1.5 strain in lab testing. The "vast majority" of patients with coronavirus are admitted for other causes or coronavirus is a complicating factor, Northwell's chief of infectious diseases Bruce Farber said. The share of those patients who received intensive care or were placed on ventilators remained stable after the rise of XBB.1.5 in

	<p>early December. “In terms of very sick people with covid, it’s almost exclusively elderly and people with a lot of morbidities or who are immunosuppressed,” he said.</p> <p>Experts hope hospitals in other parts of the country can share Northwell’s experience: weathering a rise of cases without covid wards packed with people fighting for their lives.</p> <p>“Even though this thing is continuing to evolve, if you take a step back and look at the big peaks, they are not as ferocious as let’s say delta in the last half of 2021 or the early BA.1 omicron wave,” said Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine. “Robust population immunity helps communities withstand new variants.”</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Putin thanks Russian Orthodox Church</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/putin-thanks-church-for-supporting-ukraine-invasion-in-christmas-message-11673110042?mod=world_lead_pos2">https://www.wsj.com/articles/putin-thanks-church-for-supporting-ukraine-invasion-in-christmas-message-11673110042?mod=world_lead_pos2</a>
GIST	<p>President <a href="#">Vladimir Putin</a> thanked the Russian Orthodox Church for backing <a href="#">his war in Ukraine</a> as he marked the first Orthodox Christmas since he launched his armies on a full-scale invasion, a conflict he has cast as a kind of holy war against a decadent West.</p> <p>At a midnight service in the Kremlin’s Annunciation Cathedral, Russian state television showed a somber Mr. Putin by himself with priests, crossing himself several times before the coverage cut away to a public service in the nearby Cathedral of Christ the Savior.</p> <p>In Christmas greetings published by the Kremlin, Mr. Putin commended church organizations for supporting “our soldiers.”</p> <p>Patriarch Kirill, leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, said in an interview aired on state TV Saturday that worshipers should see the war as a holy struggle against the West to preserve “the Russian world” and unite Slavic lands under Moscow’s spiritual and political control.</p> <p>“Our struggle for moral principles, our struggle for the preservation of faith is a struggle for the future of all mankind, for the life of the world—no more, no less,” he said. “We are fighting to keep human civilization viable.”</p> <p>The <a href="#">view from Moscow’s Orthodox leadership</a> contrasted with the one coming from the Vatican, where Pope Francis has deplored the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>In <a href="#">his annual Christmas message</a> in December, the pope called for peace in Ukraine, and while he has refrained from describing Russia as the aggressor, in November he compared the war to Stalin’s 1930s terror famine and last month <a href="#">to the Nazi genocide</a> of the Jews.</p> <p>In Kyiv, Orthodox Christians also gathered to celebrate Christmas on Saturday. The head of Ukraine’s main Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Epifaniy, marked the holiday with a service at the Monastery of the Caves in the capital, one of Orthodoxy’s most important sites.</p> <p>Worshippers packed the Dormition Cathedral and spilled onto its steps at the nearly 1,000-year-old monastery complex amid choral singing, bell ringing and tight security.</p> <p>The site had been used by a Russian-affiliated church that had long dominated Ukraine, but the state said its lease of the Dormition Cathedral expired at the end of last year and handed it to the independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine, established in 2019.</p> <p>The Moscow-linked church has lost popularity since the Russian invasion, and <a href="#">Kyiv is seeking to ban it</a>, amid accusations its priests have supported Russia in words and deeds. The Security Service of Ukraine</p>



raided the Monastery of the Caves in November, saying it was seeking to counter “subversive activities” by Russian intelligence agencies.

Orthodox Ukrainians [have begun switching the date](#) they celebrate Christmas to Dec. 25, in line with Christians in most of the Western world, after Metropolitan Epifaniy said he favored such a move.

Many Ukrainians, for the moment, are celebrating both dates. In a commentary for the Ukrainska Pravda news website published Saturday, Metropolitan Epifaniy called for unity in the face of Russia’s invasion. “We are [starting a new year](#) in free Ukraine,” he wrote. “May it be a year of victory in the war with the evil empire and a year of achieving a just peace.”

In a Christmas address released late Friday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky recalled that work was traditionally frowned upon during the holiday, but said Ukraine’s army “is fighting so that we don’t become prey but defeat the beast.”

In Moscow, Patriarch Kirill said Ukraine was doing everything possible to divide Ukrainians and Russians and ensure Ukrainians view Russia as an enemy. The Russian Orthodox Church’s main task was to prevent that divide from happening, he said.

In a service on Friday, he called on worshipers to pray for those expelled from the Monastery of the Caves in Kyiv, calling the site “the guardian of true, undistorted Orthodoxy.”

Mr. Putin, who has increasingly in recent weeks prepped the Russian population [for a drawn-out war](#), has on multiple occasions compared himself to Peter the Great, gathering up what he says are historically Russian lands and restoring a great Russia that the West wants to keep down.

He has leaned on the powerful Orthodox Church, which has described him as a successor to the Soviet Union’s fight against fascism, to provide the moral backing for the fight.

Mr. Putin, who typically spends the Orthodox Christmas holiday outside Moscow, attended a service in the Russian capital for the first time in 22 years, according to Russian state news agencies. It was his first Christmas at the Kremlin in his more than two decades in power.

The service took place as fighting raged in eastern Ukraine, after Kyiv rejected Mr. Putin’s call on Thursday for [a 36-hour cease-fire](#) during Russian Orthodox Christmas. Mr. Zelensky said his country wouldn’t accept any truce until Russian troops left Ukraine. The General Staff of Ukraine’s armed forces said Saturday that Russian troops had launched attacks along the front line in the eastern Donetsk region.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/07 Fighting rages in Ukraine in Russia ‘truce’
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/fighting-rages-in-ukraine-on-orthodox-christmas-despite-putins-call-for-truce-11673090349?mod=world_lead_pos1">https://www.wsj.com/articles/fighting-rages-in-ukraine-on-orthodox-christmas-despite-putins-call-for-truce-11673090349?mod=world_lead_pos1</a>
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine—Fighting raged in eastern Ukraine on Orthodox Christmas despite <a href="#">a Russian call for a cease-fire</a>, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky welcomed <a href="#">the largest package of military aid</a> from the U.S. and its allies as “timely and strong.”</p> <p>The General Staff of Ukraine’s armed forces said Russian troops had launched attacks along the front line in the eastern Donetsk region after President Vladimir Putin called for a 36-hour pause in hostilities that was to last through Saturday.</p> <p>Ukraine dismissed the proposal as a ploy by Russia to allow its forces to regroup following a series of battlefield setbacks.</p> <p>Russia’s Defense Ministry said Saturday its forces were observing a cease-fire, but that they were repelling Ukrainian offensives mainly in the Donetsk region.</p>

In Moscow, Mr. Putin attended a midnight service at a Kremlin cathedral. In Christmas greetings published by the Kremlin, he thanked Russian church organizations for supporting Russian troops.

Patriarch Kirill—the leader of the powerful Russian Orthodox Church, which has thrown its weight behind Mr. Putin’s invasion and cast it as a holy struggle against the West—said in an interview aired on Russian state television Saturday that Russia “is fighting for the future of all mankind.”

Mr. Zelensky, in his nightly address to the nation on Friday, said a \$3.75 billion package of security assistance from Western partners brought cooperation with Kyiv to a new level.

The package includes for the first time [Bradley Fighting Vehicles](#) that could help Ukrainian forces conduct more complex operations against Russian positions. Germany also said it would send Marder infantry-fighting vehicles, and France said it would send AMX-10 armored vehicles.

“This is exactly what is needed,” Mr. Zelensky said.

Ukraine’s defense minister, Oleksii Reznikov, discussed details of the package, which also contains self-propelled artillery, Humvees and hundreds of thousands of rounds of ammunition, with U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Friday.

Mr. Reznikov said the package provided Ukraine with “new capabilities to liberate our territory in the east and the south.”

Support from the U.S. and its allies has helped Ukraine retake about 40% of the territory occupied by Russia since Mr. Putin’s forces invaded more than 10 months ago. But Ukrainian officials have repeatedly complained that Western allies aren’t providing enough firepower to enable a decisive victory.

The latest aid package follows [a visit by Mr. Zelensky](#) to the U.S. in December, where he urged Washington to ramp up military aid in a speech to a joint session of Congress. On Saturday, he congratulated Republican Kevin McCarthy for [his election as House speaker](#) on the 15th ballot after days of grueling negotiations.

“U. S. support in all areas has been vital for Ukraine’s success on the battlefield,” he [wrote on Twitter](#). “We’re counting on your continued support and further U.S. assistance to bring our common victory closer.”

The addition of about 50 Bradleys—a highly maneuverable, armored tracked vehicle that resembles a tank but with a smaller gun—is designed to bolster Kyiv’s momentum in the war as well shore up Ukraine’s defenses.

The Bradleys won’t immediately arrive on the battlefield because Ukrainian forces will require training to use them.

On Friday, Anatoly Antonov, Russia’s ambassador to the U.S., said the decision of the White House to supply Ukraine with Bradleys “was a confirmation that the United States was not going to heed the repeated calls from Russia to take into account the possible consequences of such a dangerous course from Washington.”

Meanwhile, Ukrainian defenses are [coming under intense pressure](#) around the eastern city of Soledar. Ukrainian commanders say Russia has redirected armored vehicles and artillery fire toward Soledar after months of failed attempts to seize the nearby city of Bakhmut.

A Russian breakthrough in Soledar would make it difficult for Ukraine to hold on to Bakhmut, which has emerged as [one of the most hotly contested front lines](#) of the entire war. It would represent the first successful Russian offensive since Moscow mobilized 300,000 men last year.

	<p>An advance would help Moscow seize the initiative following a series of losses, including <a href="#">the southern regional capital of Kherson</a> and a swath of territory in the northern Kharkiv region.</p> <p>Late Friday, Russian war bloggers said troops with <a href="#">the Wagner paramilitary group</a> had made a breakthrough in Soledar but that fighting for the city was continuing.</p> <p>Ukrainian lawmaker Yuriy Mysiagin said on social media Saturday that Soledar is still in Ukrainian hands.</p> <p>The Bakhmut area has acquired great importance for Wagner, which has sought to storm the actual city.</p> <p>Ukrainian armed forces in the immediate area couldn't immediately be reached for comment.</p> <p>Ukrainian forces have also been pressing Russian forces around the city of Kreminna in the eastern Luhansk region in recent weeks. The U.K.'s Ministry of Defense said fighting around Kreminna was concentrated in the densely forested terrain to the west of the city.</p> <p>"Russian commanders will highly likely view pressure around Kreminna as a threat to the right flank of their Bakhmut sector, which they see as key for enabling any future advance to occupy the remainder of" the Donetsk region, the ministry said.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Jackson, Mississippi: another water crisis</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/07/jackson-mississippi-water-outage-neighbors-helping">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/07/jackson-mississippi-water-outage-neighbors-helping</a>
GIST	<p>The sense of dread on Christmas Eve felt all too familiar.</p> <p>The faucets ran dry again. The showers produced nothing. The city of Jackson, Mississippi, plunged into its third major water outage in less than two years, crippled, leaking infrastructure withering before another bout of extreme weather.</p> <p>For many here, the latest crisis reinvigorated feelings of abandonment and anger that had barely dissipated from the last major outage, just a few months earlier.</p> <p>As she sat on her deep brown sofa, Anita Carter recalled the realization her water was gone with calm indignation. She scrapped plans for Christmas dinner. Found the bottles she keeps in reserve. Left buckets in the yard to collect rainwater. But, two weeks later, there is still next to nothing, as pressure failed to return to the pipes in her home, and boil-water advisories remain in many parts of the city.</p> <p>"It seems like you have to be without it longer every time," she said, as her eight grandchildren scampered around the home in the suburb of south Jackson. "There's so much stress."</p> <p>With water outages and boil advisories becoming increasingly familiar to Jackson's 150,000 residents – caused by an aging and underfunded system that routinely fails to withstand extreme cold – Carter and her family invited the Guardian to spend a day with them as they entered their third week without water.</p> <p>It underlined the daily struggle faced by thousands in this predominantly Black city, where poorer neighborhoods have routinely borne the brunt of the ongoing disaster. Simple tasks become complex or insurmountable. Greater burdens are placed on those living further from resources. And, for many, the days are centered around an often frantic search for clean and fresh water.</p> <p>Thursday was supposed to be the first day back at school for Carter's grandchildren. But with low water pressure throughout the city, <a href="#">all 33 of Jackson's schools remained closed</a>, sending pupils to virtual learning at home.</p>

As morning broke, and her grandchildren arrived from their mother's home, Carter was faced with a multitude of tasks intensified by empty pipes: cooking a meal for a family of 10, washing the pile of dishes from last night, making sure her grandchildren were paying attention to their lessons.

The household relies on two large stock pots to boil water on the electric coil stove, and Carter carried a heavy case of bottles into the kitchen, pouring dozens into the pot. The sheer volume means it takes more than 30 minutes to bring it to boil before any dishwashing or food prep can commence.

"There's never enough," she said, as her 10-year-old granddaughter Miracle fetched more bottles in between virtual classes. "We're always looking for more water."

They stockpile cases of water around the living room, and tuck non-potable water for flushing the toilet into cupboards. Mark Jackson, her 32-year-old son, who lives at home, is often tasked with finding more.

He arrives early at the distribution locations around the city where queues can sometimes wind for hours. On other occasions he has driven to the neighboring city of Ridgeland, which has a separate water system, equipped with empty bottles and jugs that he fills at motels or fast food restaurants to bring home.

He has lived with sickle cell anemia all his life, and he needs to remain constantly hydrated to ward off pain crises. But on New Year's Eve he found himself bed-bound in pain.

"It makes you mad sometimes," he said, watching over his twin six-year-old nieces Akayla and Ma'kayla as they completed their math class online. "But it doesn't work to dwell on it."

---

The same morning, Jackson's mayor, Chokwe Lumumba, [held a press conference](#) to discuss plans to drastically overhaul the city's crumbling water infrastructure. In November [last year](#) the entire system was taken under federal government oversight after the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [found](#) the city in violation of the Safe Drinking Water Act. The move followed a hellish summer in Jackson, after heavy flooding and power outages resulted in severe water shortages for weeks.

After years of [chronic underfunding by the Republican-led state government](#), the US Congress apportioned \$600m to pay for the redevelopment as part of the government spending package signed in December.

Four Republicans from Mississippi's congressional delegation, Representatives Michael Guest, Trent Kelly and Steven Palazzo and Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith, [voted against the bill](#).

None responded to repeated requests for comment from the Guardian.

As he addressed the press on Thursday, and despite the boil notices and low pressure in parts of the city, Mayor Lumumba struck a tone of cautious optimism.

"We did not get here overnight, and our full recovery will take many years, but we are well on our way," he said. "I look forward to better days."

The mayor was flanked by Ted Henifin, the city's new third-party water system administrator appointed by the federal government, and, [according to local reports](#), neither would say when the funding would become available or what the order and process of the repairs would be.

Henifin said that pressure was being restored throughout the city and anticipated a lifting of the boil advisory in the near future. But, he added, "even if we have just one person without water, that is too many".

---

In the neighborhood of Queens-Magnolia Terrace, in the city's north-west, most households were still without pressure.

April Jackson, Anita Carter's daughter and the mother of her eight grandchildren, was at work for the [Mississippi](#) Poor People's Campaign – which is preparing to file a series of lawsuits alleging constitutional violations and breaches of the Fair Housing Act on behalf of the city's residents – going door to door and dropping off bottled water to residents who had requested help from the city. The group is part of a rapid response coalition, consisting of around 30 volunteers who make deliveries every day. But need has surpassed resources every day since Christmas.

At one doorstep, 73-year-old David McGowan spoke of how, for three days during Christmas, he had no access to bottled water at all, and relied on rationed water from buckets and jugs he had filled before the water went out. Both his cars weren't running and he had no way of reaching the local church where bottled water was being distributed.

"I just feel let down," he said. "This is no way to live."

A few blocks away Theresa Rattler, 45, stood in her doorway in a bright pink dressing gown, another neighbor with no water pressure since Christmas. Her bottled stocks had gotten so low she had begun skipping her diabetes medication.

As she finished her drop-offs for the day, in the mid-afternoon, Jackson headed back to her mother's home where her eldest sons, Jacob and Jamaris, bounded out of the house to help carry in more cases of water.

All four burners were set to boil as Anita and Mark prepared cooking and bathing water for the children.

Anita recalled how the family had moved from the town of Louisville in the state's north-east so Mark could receive the regular blood transfusions he needed to treat his sickle cell anemia.

"If I could go back, I would," she said. "There's water in other places. I just don't understand why we can't have it here, in a city."

With the meal almost ready – spaghetti, boiled broccoli, corn on the cob and baked chicken – she moved to the bathroom carrying a small pan of boiling water from the stove.

She poured it gently into the small bathroom sink until half full and measured the heat with her fingertips as cold water from another bottle was added.

She lowered her youngest grandchild, five-month-old McKensleigh, into the sink, protecting her head from the taps.

"Hey little lady," she said as the baby smiled. "I think she's happy."

It was a small moment of joy, before she thought again: would there be enough for everyone else?

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/07 Day 318 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/07/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-318-of-the-invasion">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/07/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-318-of-the-invasion</a>
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>The US will provide a new weapons aid package for Ukraine and its neighbours worth more than \$3.75bn (£3.1bn)</b>, the White House has <a href="#">announced</a>, including for the first time several dozen Bradley fighting vehicles. The package includes a \$2.85bn drawdown from the Pentagon's stocks that will be sent directly to Ukraine and \$225m in foreign military financing to build the long-term capacity and support the modernisation of Ukraine's military, <a href="#">the White House said</a>.</li><li>• <b>A unilateral 36-hour ceasefire in Ukraine declared by Russian president Vladimir Putin came into effect on Friday.</b> The ceasefire on "the entire contact line" would continue until the end of Saturday, Russia's state first TV channel <a href="#">reported</a>. The Russian president's order came after</li></ul>

	<p>Patriarch Kirill, head of the Orthodox church in Russia, <a href="#">called for a ceasefire</a> and a Christmas truce in Ukraine to enable Orthodox people to attend services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelenskiy rejected Russia's ceasefire proposal</b>, which many observers have speculated is aimed to allow Russian soldiers to rest. The Ukrainian president <a href="#">claimed</a> its goal was to halt the progress of Ukraine's forces in Donetsk and the wider eastern Donbas region and bring in more of Moscow's forces.</li> <li>• <b>US president Joe Biden <a href="#">said Putin</a> was "trying to find some oxygen"</b> by floating the ceasefire, noting that the Russian leader did not implement the break on 25 December, which many Orthodox Ukrainians celebrate, or on New Year. Putin's announcement was likely an information operation <a href="#">intended to damage Ukraine's reputation</a>, according to US thinktank the Institute for the Study of War.</li> <li>• <b>Artillery exchanges pounded war-scarred cities in eastern Ukraine despite Putin's ceasefire declaration.</b> Outgoing and incoming shelling in the frontline city of Bakhmut was heard after the unilateral truce was supposed to have begun, Agence France-Presse reported. Russian forces also struck the city of Kramatorsk in the eastern Donetsk region, the Ukrainian presidential administration said, as well as the frontline town of Kurakhove, where residential buildings and a medical facility were damaged.</li> <li>• <b>Russian troops opened fire 14 times in Luhansk region during the first three hours of Moscow's unilateral ceasefire</b>, said the eastern Ukraine region's governor, Serhiy Haidai.</li> <li>• <b>Russia accused Ukrainian troops of shelling its military positions in the occupied Donetsk region</b> just as the Moscow-declared ceasefire came into effect. Russian-installed officials in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic posted on Telegram that "six shells of 155 mm calibre were fired" from "155 mm Nato artillery guns", Russian state-run news agency Tass <a href="#">reported</a>.</li> <li>• <b>Ukraine's military intelligence has claimed Russia is set to order the mobilisation of as many as 500,000 conscripts in January</b> in addition to the 300,000 it called up in October. Vadym Skibitsky, Ukraine's deputy military intelligence chief, said Ukraine believed <a href="#">the conscripts would be part of a string of Russian offensives</a> over the spring and summer in the east and south of the country.</li> <li>• <b>Ukraine will need at least \$1.79bn (£1.48bn) to restore its telecommunications sector to prewar levels</b>, according to a United Nations report. Russia has <a href="#">"destroyed completely or seized" networks</a> in parts of Ukraine, and communications infrastructure in more than 10 of the country's 24 regions have been considerably damaged and destroyed, the Geneva-based International Telecommunication Union said.</li> </ul>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	01/08 Day 319 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/08/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-319-of-the-invasion">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/08/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-319-of-the-invasion</a>
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Russian <a href="#">attacks were reported</a> in at least seven regions in Ukraine's east and south, despite Moscow's declaration of a 36-hour ceasefire from midday on Friday to midnight on Saturday for Orthodox Christmas. At least three people were killed.</li> <li>• <b>Russian troops shelled the Kherson region 39 times on Friday</b>, according to governor Yaroslav Yanushevych. Residential buildings and a fire station building came under fire in the liberated city of Kherson, where a first responder was killed. Seven civilians were also wounded in the region.</li> <li>• <b>Ukraine's military said two were killed and 13 injured in Russia's shelling of Bakhmut</b>, eastern Ukraine, during the purported ceasefire. The two dead were a 66-year-old man and 61-year-old woman.</li> <li>• <b>Russian troops were "terrorising" civilians in the north-eastern region of Kharkiv, said its governor, Oleh Syniehubov.</b> No casualties have been reported, but residential and commercial buildings continued to come under fire.</li> <li>• <b>Russian forces shelled Ukrainian positions 14 times and stormed one settlement three times in the frontline eastern Luhansk province</b> in the first three hours of the purported ceasefire, governor Serhiy Haidai said, according to Reuters. It heard explosions of what Ukrainian troops at the frontline described as incoming Russian rocket fire. Ukrainians fired back from tanks.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Russian-installed governor of the occupied Crimean city of Sevastopol has said air defences shot down a drone in an apparent attack</b> on the port where Russia's Black Sea fleet is based. Mikhail Razvozhayev alleged that the incident took place early on Saturday.</li> <li>• <b>The <a href="#">UK Ministry of Defence</a> said fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces continued at a "routine level" into the Orthodox Christmas period.</b> The ministry's daily intelligence update stated that fighting was focused in heavily forested terrain to the west of the town of Kremina in eastern Ukraine's Luhansk province, where "combat has devolved to dismounted infantry fighting, often at short range".</li> <li>• <b>The US has asked Italy to provide air defence systems to Ukraine as soon as possible.</b> The Italian newspaper La Repubblica reported that the request was made in a conversation between the US national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, and Francesco Talo, an adviser to the Italian prime minister, Giorgia Meloni.</li> <li>• <b>The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, has praised the US for including tank-killing armoured vehicles in its <a href="#">latest multibillion-dollar package</a> of military aid,</b> saying they are "exactly what is needed". The latest US military assistance announced on Friday by the White House was the biggest to date for Kyiv, and for the first time included Bradley armoured vehicles.</li> <li>• <b>Services have taken place in Ukraine to mark the first Orthodox Christmas since Russia's invasion of the country last year.</b> Metropolitan Epiphanius led a Christmas service at the Holy Dormition Cathedral at the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra in the Ukrainian capital.</li> <li>• <b>Ukraine has updated the number of Russian troops it believes it has killed to 110,740.</b> The general staff of the armed forces said in an update on Saturday that a further 490 troops were killed on Friday.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Census: 2.9M cited Covid for not working</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/6/census-nearly-3-million-americans-cited-covid-not/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/6/census-nearly-3-million-americans-cited-covid-not/</a>
GIST	<p>Nearly 3 million Americans cited COVID-19 as their reason for not working last month, according to new Census Bureau data.</p> <p>A projected 1,880,551 out of 94,318,693 non-working adults in December were either "sick with coronavirus symptoms or caring for someone" with them, including long COVID symptoms, the bureau reported Thursday.</p> <p>And an estimated 1,014,887 Americans did not work because they were "concerned about getting or spreading the coronavirus," the Census found.</p> <p>Census researchers extrapolated the numbers from data collected Dec. 9-19 in the latest Household Pulse Survey, a weekly measure of pandemic social impacts that launched in April 2020.</p> <p>"Workers learned for the better part of two years that COVID is the best possible excuse for not working," said Jeffrey Tucker, president of the free-market Brownstone Institute for Social and Economic Research, commenting on the survey.</p> <p>The bureau did not provide any interpretation of the numbers.</p> <p>"The Census Bureau collects and makes these data available to the public for further analysis. We do not have any specific analyses of these findings," the U.S. Census Bureau said in an email to The Washington Times.</p> <p>The Census figures echo a pandemic unemployment survey that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce released in May 2021, Nov. 2021 and May of last year.</p> <p>In the most-cited answer last May, 28% of respondents said personal illness kept them from looking for work, unchanged from November 2021. Another 27% blamed the need to care for others at home — an increase of four percentage points over the same period.</p>

The research shows labor force participation has “not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels,” said Curtis Dubay, chief economist for the Chamber of Commerce.

“There are a number of reasons for that, including retirements, a lower amount of legal immigration, childcare challenges, and padded savings from the pandemic,” Mr. Dubay said in a statement Friday. “But another factor that has continued to stick around is people saying that being sick is keeping them out of the workforce.”

In May’s survey, 66% of respondents who lost jobs during the pandemic were “only somewhat active” or “not very active at all” in seeking work. Another 24% said government aid packages during the pandemic “incentivized them to not actively look for work,” the business lobbying group reported.

The roughly 2.9 million Americans whom the Census estimates avoided work for COVID-related reasons last month appears to equal the number who remain out of the workforce since the pandemic started.

The national workforce remains about 2.8 million Americans short of pre-pandemic levels, according to a Heritage Foundation analysis of Bureau and Labor Statistics (BLS) data released Friday.

But the Census projections that millions did not work because of COVID last month could be misleading, said Rachel Greszler, a Heritage senior research fellow.

She noted in an email that new COVID cases averaged about 450,000 a week in December, a peak time for infections. And BLS projections suggest only 452,000 people did not actively look for work over the previous four weeks because of the coronavirus, she said.

“These very different estimates seem illogical, but a lot of the apparent contradiction is the result of the question being asked,” Ms. Greszler said. “Do we want to know how many people aren’t working and aren’t looking for work because of COVID-19, or do we want to know how many people are not working on a given day because of the direct health impacts of COVID-19?”

According to the latest survey, an estimated 41,911,825 Americans did not work last month because they were retired. Another 10,982,276 were sick or disabled for non-COVID reasons and 4,542,064 “did not want to be employed at this time.”

To cover their expenses last month, millions reported using federal government assistance programs within the previous seven days.

The Census estimated that 10,494,467 out-of-work adults relied on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and 2,299,227 used the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

Another 1,400,052 people collected unemployment insurance benefits and 2,109,499 relied on loan deferment or forgiveness to get by, the Census reported.

Roughly 3.8 million Americans receiving SNAP, WIC, unemployment insurance and loan forgiveness did not blame COVID or natural disasters, noted Michael Austin, a former chief economic adviser to two Kansas governors.

“Too many Americans are receiving government handouts to not work,” Mr. Austin, an economist at the National Center for Public Policy Research’s Project 21, said in an email. “Unless the federal government pulls back, don’t expect the labor force to bounce back, COVID or not.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/08 Anxiety: China lifts Covid border controls
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/08/world/asia/china-covid-border.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/08/world/asia/china-covid-border.html</a>

HONG KONG — Over the past three years, Zhou Wanhui, a Hong Kong resident, has visited her parents in China just three times. Though they live only two hours away by train, Covid restrictions made it so difficult to cross the Hong Kong border into mainland China that one of Ms. Zhou's trips included a three-hour flight to Shanghai and nearly a month of quarantine in two cities.

Families like Ms. Zhou's — kept apart for weddings and funerals, birthdays and graduations — are finally preparing for less arduous reunions.

On Sunday, China fully opened its borders for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic began, welcoming visitors without strict quarantine requirements and allowing its citizens to go overseas once again just as the travel period for Lunar New Year, typically the busiest season, begins. In Hong Kong's airport, hundreds of people waited to check in for flights to cities in the south like Xiamen and Chongqing and in the north like Beijing and Tianjin, but the arrivals hall was more quiet. Many of the city's border checkpoints were reopened; empty transportation halls filled up with groups of people, and shuttered storefronts were open once again.

Ms. Zhou, 22, a university student, texted her parents that she planned to be home for Lunar New Year on Jan. 22. "Wow, this is such happy news! The border is finally open," her parents wrote back with a line of thumbs-up emoji.

But unease, from both travelers and nations that have long waited to welcome deep-pocketed Chinese tourists again, has tempered the celebratory mood.

As China swiftly abandoned Covid restrictions, a ferocious outbreak has ripped through the country in recent weeks, causing chaos in hospitals and putting pressure on health care workers. Beijing's decision, announced less than two weeks ago, to open its borders has left many surprised, confused and cautious.

"It was too abrupt," said Jenny Zhao, 34, referring to China's swift reversal of its Covid policies. Ms. Zhao, who is a marketing manager, has been living in Singapore for the past year. She found herself stuck overseas with near-impossible barriers to getting back home to China last year and decided to stay put after finding a job with an international company.

Now, with infections spreading in China, Ms. Zhao isn't sure she is ready to go back.

"All of my family members, including my grandmother, who is 88 years old, have gotten Covid," Ms. Zhao said. Her mother told her that everyone in their 3,000-unit compound in the southern city of Chongqing seems to be sick with the virus.

Instead of going there over the Lunar New Year, Ms. Zhao has decided to wait until summer to see her family. By then, she hopes, the current surge in Covid numbers will have fallen, restrictions on Chinese travelers overseas will have eased and airfare will be less expensive. Ms. Zhao said she plans to then take her parents on a trip to Thailand.

Nations around the world are eager to welcome the return of Chinese tourists like Ms. Zhao and her parents. Before the pandemic, Chinese tourists spent \$250 billion a year overseas. Their abrupt disappearance in early 2020, when China suspended tour groups and travel packages, plunged many tour guides and travel operators into bankruptcy. The impact was acutely felt in places like Thailand, Japan and South Korea.

But some of those same countries are also hesitating between attracting Chinese tourists and concerns from health experts about the extent of China's Covid outbreak, the potential for new mutations of the coronavirus and the possible strain that sick tourists could have on health care systems.

Global health experts and the World Health Organization have warned that the outbreak in China, and the country's opacity in reporting cases, has made it hard to assess the severity of the situation.

In recent days, dozens of countries worldwide have started to require Covid testing and health monitoring of travelers coming from China. That's prompted rebuke from Beijing, which has argued that the moves have no scientific basis.

The European Union on Wednesday said it "strongly encouraged" its 27 members to put in place testing and masking requirements as Chinese travelers begin to return to popular European cities.

Even Hong Kong, where the government imposed many of the same border restrictions as China until a few months ago, has taken a cautious approach to opening its border with the mainland, capping the number of visitors at 60,000 people a day. The rule will be applied to Hong Kong visitors traveling north as well. Anyone entering either side of the border is required to show a negative P.C.R. test.

On Jeju Island, a South Korean destination once favored by Chinese tourists, many businesses are in wait-and-see mode. The government has halted all direct flights from China to the island, redirecting visitors to the country's main airport in Seoul, where travelers will have to take a P.C.R. test upon arrival and quarantine if they are found to be sick.

"We are focused on alternative markets for the time being, such as Japan and Southeast Asia," said Kim Chang-hyo, an official at the Jeju Island Tourism Association. South Korea has also stopped processing short-term visas for Chinese nationals, except those for diplomatic or business visits.

Thailand's response has been friendlier. One government minister floated the idea of offering booster vaccines to Chinese tourists. Another urged Thais not to "bully" Chinese visitors based on unfounded fears about Covid.

But the Thai government is also taking measures to prevent its hospital system from being inundated by a sudden outbreak now that China's borders are open. All visitors to the country must have two shots of a Covid vaccine, and the government has recommended mask-wearing in public. Visitors also must also have medical insurance to cover Covid treatment if they get sick.

Thailand is anticipating around 300,000 Chinese visitors in the first three months of 2023, said Yuthasak Supasorn, governor of the country's Tourism Authority. "There are only 15 flights per week compared to before Covid, where there are around 400 flights per week," he said. Before the pandemic, nearly a million Chinese tourists visited every month.

At the Maetaeng Elephant Park in the northern Thai province of Chiang Mai, employees said they were excited to see Chinese tourists return. For now, though, they are busy with South Koreans, who have largely replaced the Chinese as their biggest clientele.

"It is all still wait and see," said Thipsuda Pongmalee, a sales and marketing manager at the park.

In Osaka, Japan, where Chinese tourists would sometimes make the news for what the Japanese call "bakugai" — or explosive buying — the optimism is also muted. "Of course, it has been much quieter without tourists from China, the city has been less lively," said Makoto Tsuda, an official with the Osaka Prefecture's Tourism Promotion office. Before the pandemic, nearly half of all foreign visitors to the city came from China, he said.

Japan is requiring visitors from China to provide a negative P.C.R. test before arriving and to take another test when they arrive. Mr. Tsuda said he expects to see more visitors from China, but perhaps not right away.

"I do think there is an additional hurdle compared with visitors from other countries, so it may not be a sudden burst of incoming tourists from China, but more gradual," Mr. Tsuda said.

Among those at Hong Kong International airport on Sunday was Yan Yan, a 55-year-old garment wholesaler who had traveled from South Carolina with her husband.

	<p>They waited patiently to check their luggage on a Xiamen Airlines flight to Tianjin as the lines in a packed departures hall inched forward.</p> <p>She used to visit her parents in Tianjin every year. But this will be her first time home since the start of the pandemic in early 2020. Limited flights and abrupt cancellations, not to mention onerous quarantines and P.C.R. testing, had deterred her until now. One of her friends who had flown back to China had spent the entire trip between quarantine facilities.</p> <p>“Now that the restrictions have loosened, it’s much better,” she said, adding that she was relieved to see her relatives after they had recovered from difficult bouts of Covid several weeks ago.</p> <p>“It will be a great new year to spend with family.”</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Iran executes 2 anti-government protesters</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/07/world/middleeast/iran-executes-protesters.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/07/world/middleeast/iran-executes-protesters.html</a>
GIST	<p>Iran on Saturday hanged two men, a 22-year-old national karate champion and a 39-year-old poultry worker, who participated in antigovernment demonstrations and whose executions were condemned as a ploy by the government to use violence and sow fear to crush the protests.</p> <p>The men, Mohammad Mehdi Karami, the karate champion, and Sayed Mohammad Hosseini, the factory worker, were hanged at dawn on Saturday in the city of Karaj near the capital, Tehran, after hasty trials on charges that they participated in the killing of a member of the Basij paramilitary group in November, according to the judiciary.</p> <p>Iran has deployed heavy-handed violence against protesters since mid-September, when the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in the custody of the morality police sparked a nationwide uprising to demand an end to theocratic rule in Iran. Rights groups say at least 500 people have been killed by security forces, including 50 children, and the United Nations says at least 14,000 have been arrested.</p> <p>At least 13 of the detained protesters have been sentenced to death, among them a doctor, a bodybuilding champion, a rapper and a barber, with their charges ranging from burning a trash can to allegations of killing security forces, according to Amnesty International. Two men were executed in December, one of them was hanged in public from a crane with a sack over his head.</p> <p>The trial for Mr. Karami and Mr. Hosseini, held in Iran’s Revolutionary Court, lasted less than a week and relied on forced confessions and shoddy evidence, according to Amnesty International.</p> <p>The men were denied lawyers of their choice and were represented by attorneys appointed by the government, according to Mr. Karami’s family and rights groups. Both men had denied the allegations against them.</p> <p>The executions shocked Iranians who had been campaigning and protesting against the execution of protesters and drew widespread condemnation from the United States, France and the United Kingdom.</p> <p>“Appalled by the regime’s execution of two more young Iranians after sham trials,” Robert Malley, the U.S. special envoy for Iran, said in a <a href="#">tweet</a>. “These executions must stop. We and others across the globe will continue to hold Iran’s leadership accountable.”</p> <p>Four protesters have now been executed and least 15 others are at risk of receiving death sentences because they have been charged with capital offenses, rights groups said.</p> <p>“The Islamic Republic has demonstrated yet again that it has no policy but reliance on maximum violence to address ongoing and growing opposition to its rule,” said Hadi Ghaemi, the director of the New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran.</p>

On Thursday, Iran arrested Mehdi Beik, the political editor of the Etemad newspaper, whose interviews with families of those on death row, including Mr. Karami's father, have gained national attention.

In an audio interview posted online, the senior Mr. Karami said he is a street vendor who sells napkins and had invested his life savings to help his son realize his athletic dreams.

Mr. Karami's parents had camped outside the prison where they had heard their son might be executed and had begged prison officials for a last visit but were denied, according to Iranian news reports.

A photo of Mr. Karami, who is Kurdish, circulated on social media showing a tattoo of the Olympic rings on his muscular arms. His family said he dreamed of making it to the Olympics one day, and the tattoo was for inspiration.

A [video](#) from Saturday shows his grave covered in a traditional termeh textile, typically used for weddings, and white flowers. A woman said to be his mother is heard sobbing and wailing and saying his name.

Before Saturday's executions, the lawyer for Mr. Hosseini, Ali Sharifzadeh Zakani, tweeted that he had filed an appeal on Wednesday and was told by the authorities to come back on Saturday to register the appeal.

He said he was on his way to the court when he heard his client had been hanged. "Why so much hurry? You could have at least allowed one more review of the case," he said in a [tweet](#). He had said earlier that Mr. Hosseini had been severely tortured in detention.

Mr. Hosseini's parents are both dead, and according to Iranian news media reports, no family members have yet claimed his body. In his trial, he had said he was on his way to the cemetery to visit his parents' graves when was caught in protest traffic and the clashes that resulted in the death of the Basij member.

In a public outpouring of grief for both men on social media, many Iranians said they would mourn for Mr. Hosseini in the absence of his family. Azar Mahisefat, a social media influencer and home cook who has half a million followers on [Instagram](#), wrote, "My son, tonight I cried for you as the mother you did not have."

Hamideh Abbasali, an Olympian and the captain of Iran's national women's karate team, condemned the executions. On Instagram, [she wrote about Mr. Karami](#), "This kid did not deserve to be denied the right to live the rest of his life," and added that "Injustice will not last forever."

On Saturday night, protests broke out in several neighborhoods in Tehran, [videos](#) posted on social media showed, with crowds chanting, "For every person killed, there are a thousand others behind him."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/07 Aging Asia: 'retirement' means more work
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/07/world/asia/japan-workers-retirement.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/07/world/asia/japan-workers-retirement.html</a>
GIST	<p>TOKYO — All Yoshihito Oonami wants to do is retire and give his worn body a rest.</p> <p>Instead, every morning at 1:30, Mr. Oonami, 73, wakes up and drives an hour to a fresh produce market on an islet in Tokyo Bay. While loading mushrooms, ginger root, sweet potatoes, radishes and other vegetables into his car, he frequently lifts boxes that weigh more than 15 pounds, straining his back. He then drives across Japan's capital city, making restaurant deliveries up to 10 times a day.</p> <p>"As long as my body lets me, I need to keep working," Mr. Oonami said on a recent morning, checking off orders on a clipboard as he walked briskly through the market.</p>



With populations across East Asia declining and fewer young people entering the work force, increasingly workers like Mr. Oonami are toiling well into their 70s and beyond. Companies desperately need them, and the older employees desperately need the work. Early retirement ages have bloated the pension rolls, making it difficult for governments in Asia to pay retirees enough money each month to live on.

Demographers have warned about a looming demographic time bomb in wealthy nations for years. But Japan and its neighbors have already started to feel the effects, with governments, companies — and most of all, older residents — grappling with the far-reaching consequences of an aging society. The changes have been most pronounced in the workplace.

Working at his age “is not fun,” said Mr. Oonami, rummaging through a box of carrots. “But I do it to survive.”

For some older people, the demand for workers has given them new opportunities and leverage with employers, especially if they felt pushed out by early retirement ages in favor of younger workers. Now, the question these aging nations are grappling with is how to adapt to the new reality — and potential benefits — of an older work force, while ensuring that people can retire after a lifetime of work without falling into poverty.

In East Asia, where populations are graying faster than anywhere else in the world, there is an urgent need for more flexibility. Japan, South Korea and China have all been forced to experiment with policy changes — such as corporate subsidies and retirement adjustments — to accommodate population shifts. Now, with the [rest of the world not far behind](#), many nations will likely look to Asia for lessons in how to respond to similar crises.

“Are you just going to panic about it and run around being frightened?” said Stuart Gietel Basten, a professor of social science at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. “Or do you say, ‘It’s very complex, and we will have to adapt our lives and institutions in lots and lots of different ways?’”

#### **Adapting to the needs of older workers.**

Long before Mr. Oonami started delivering vegetables, he tried working in an office and as a cabdriver. Eventually, he decided he preferred the solo life of a truck driver. That decision consigned him to perennial contract work rather than the more traditional path taken by many early postwar employees in Japan, with lifelong jobs of guaranteed salaries, regular promotions and corporate retirement benefits.

As a truck driver, Mr. Oonami would often lift heavy cargo, which became unsustainable for him after he turned 50. His doctor told him that so much lifting had worn down the cartilage in his spine. “Moving the boxes was very rough for my body,” Mr. Oonami said.

He switched to smaller delivery jobs and landed a contract at the produce market about 15 years ago. Yet even as he approached Japan’s traditional retirement age of 60, Mr. Oonami could not afford to stop working. Having held contract gigs his entire career, he is only eligible for a basic national pension — about 60,000 yen a month, or about \$477 — not enough to cover his daily expenses.

Japan isn’t the only country in East Asia where older people feel they have no choice but to keep working. In South Korea, with a poverty rate among older people close to 40 percent, a similar proportion of those 65 and older are still working. In Hong Kong, one in eight older residents works. The ratio is more than a quarter in Japan — compared to 18 percent in the United States.

In Japan and South Korea, temporary job agencies and unions have formed to support these older laborers. While many of them must work out of economic necessity, employers have also become more reliant on them.

To cope with what demographers call “super aging societies,” policymakers in East Asia initially focused on trying to spur births and tinkering with immigration laws to shore up work forces. Such measures have

done little to alter the aging trend line, as fertility rates have plunged and many countries have resisted large-scale immigration plans.

That has left employers desperate for workers. In Japan, for example, surveys show that as many as half of companies report shortages of full-time workers. Older workers have stepped in to fill the gaps. “We have so much unused and untapped working capacity,” said Naohiro Ogawa, a visiting fellow at the Asian Development Bank Institute.

Koureisha is a temporary agency in Tokyo where job listings specify that applicants must be at least 60 years old. Fumio Murazeki, the president, said he believed employers were growing more receptive to hiring older workers. “People who are over 65, or even up until 75, they are very active and healthy,” he said.

Rental car agencies and building concierge services are eager to hire older workers, said Mr. Murazeki. One popular job for older contract workers is to sit in the front passenger seat of service vehicles while electricians or gas repairmen assist clients on site. The contract worker can move the vehicle when necessary, helping companies avoid parking tickets or traffic fines, Mr. Murazeki said.

At Tokyu Community, a property management company for apartment complexes in Tokyo, almost half the staff is 65 or older, said Hiroyuki Ikeda, head of human resources. With a salary of just 2,300,000 yen a year — less than \$17,146 — the jobs do not appeal to younger workers, while older people are willing to accept the low pay to supplement their pension income.

The Japanese government now provides subsidies to small- and medium-sized companies that install accommodations for older workers, like additional railings on staircases or extra rest areas for workers.

Gloria, a company outside of Tokyo that produces uniforms for policemen, abolished its mandatory retirement age six years ago because of a labor shortage. To assist its older workers, the company built a ramp to the front door and moved electrical wires previously strung across the factory floor to the walls and ceilings to prevent employees from tripping.

On its website, Gloria says it wants to “become a company where people can work until they themselves decide they want to quit.”

Aikawa Unsou, a delivery company, installed grip handles in its trucks to help drivers climb into and out of vehicles. “The work environment has to be aging-friendly,” said Feng Qiushi, an associate professor of anthropology and sociology at the National University of Singapore. “They need to provide training opportunities and provide flexible retirement opportunities.”

### **Trying to make ends meet on a small pension.**

While social media will often showcase inspirational septuagenarians lifting weights or running successful small businesses, older people in China, Hong Kong, Japan or South Korea are just as likely to be low-paid office cleaners, grocery store clerks, delivery service drivers or security guards.

Full-time, stable employment is reserved for the relatively young in these countries, leaving many older workers to engage in precarious, low-wage contract jobs after being forced out of their long-term employment by low retirement ages. Once they retire, state-backed pensions usually do not cover basic living expenses. In Japan, China and South Korea, the average monthly pension is under \$500. And unlike in the United States, 401(k)s are not yet widely available in the region.

To help fend off a labor shortage and keep up with pension payments, governments are trying to nudge retirement ages higher, which has sparked some resistance. In China, “people get angry,” said Sheying Chen, a professor of public administration and social policy at Pace University in New York. “They say, ‘I worked full-time and made it to retirement age — you want me to work more?’”

More often, it is employers who balk at legislative efforts to lift retirement ages. With the seniority-based pay systems that are prevalent across East Asia, companies want to push older employees off the payroll, not extend their time on the job.

“Even if older people are equally productive, if you’re forced to pay them more because they have been hanging around longer, their cost-effectiveness is going to be lower,” said Philip O’Keefe, a director at the Centre of Excellence in Population Aging Research in Sydney, Australia.

In the absence of more government support, some older people are forging their own working opportunities. Li Man, 67, was forced to retire at 45 from a job at a state-owned refrigerated warehouse in Beijing. The government told her it was too dangerous for her to continue working in freezing temperatures.

Ms. Li figured she could still work “in the prime time of my life” to afford her daughter’s tuition and living expenses at film school in California. She started babysitting and selling homemade dishes like braised fish and stir-fried pork with squash to neighbors.

“Going back to work has made me less anxious,” said Ms. Li. Yet lately, she is plagued by back pain and high blood pressure. “Maybe it’s time to retire,” she said.

For Mr. Oonami, the vegetable delivery man in Japan, retirement is just a dream. A twice-divorced father of three, he lives with his youngest son. He has no savings and said he takes vitamin supplements to keep healthy. “Right now,” he said, “I can’t even imagine a life where I am not working.”

Given his early schedule, he has little time for hobbies. When he arrives home in the afternoon, Mr. Oonami usually fixes himself a stir-fried dinner, feeds his two Maltese dogs and falls asleep by 6 p.m.

#### **“You shouldn’t work until the end.”**

Eiji Sudo, 69, wasn’t quite ready to retire.

He had spent more than four decades working maintenance and construction jobs at Tokyo Gas, a natural gas supplier. He retired at 60, and the company offered him a four-day-a-week contract at about half his peak salary. Once he hit 65, though, the company would no longer extend his contract, he said.

To earn enough money to travel comfortably with his wife, Kazue, Mr. Sudo wanted to keep working. He signed up with the Koureisha agency and now works as a [contractor for Asuqa](#), a gas pipeline company in Tokyo. Three days a week he drives to neighborhoods where the company is installing or repairing gas lines, knocking on doors to inform residents of upcoming construction work.

About one in 10 workers at Asuqa are 65 or older. Most of them officially retired at 60 — the company’s retirement age — and subsequently accepted contract roles at reduced pay. “We have always had to supplement by rehiring older workers,” said Kazuyuki Tabata, an Asuqa manager.

Mr. Sudo said he enjoys traveling across multiple suburbs and meeting new people. It keeps him curious and engaged, he said, and is better than playing golf every day. “Every person is different,” he said. “It is good for me.”

His wife, who faithfully packs him a homemade lunch when he works, appreciates that he gets out of the house: It means they both have “our ‘me time,’” she said. Still, “it would be very sad for anyone to die working,” she added. “You shouldn’t work until the end like that.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/08 Volunteers seek revenge against Russia
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/08/world/europe/ukraine-russia-volunteers-chechens-tatars.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/08/world/europe/ukraine-russia-volunteers-chechens-tatars.html</a>

KYIV REGION, Ukraine — The sharp crack of sniper fire rang out across the snowbound valley. Soldiers in white camouflage crouched low, shooting at the hill opposite to provide cover as four men evacuated a casualty.

The action was part of a live-fire training exercise for new recruits on a recent morning outside the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv. But there was an unusual element to the event. While a Ukrainian Army officer was giving the orders, the trainees were members of a volunteer Chechen battalion that also mixed in some Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians.

Ukraine's military commanders have long said they do not lack soldiers for the war, but they have nonetheless welcomed to their ranks thousands of volunteers, including foreign citizens. Many of them, like the Chechens, are refugees from Russia itself. Others have come from surrounding nations, like Georgia, that have a history of opposition to Moscow and the leadership of President Vladimir V. Putin.

"We saw what was happening," said Muslim Madiyev, a gray-bearded deputy commander of the Chechen battalion, wearing ear protectors to muffle the sound of gunfire as he watched the training exercises. "Ukraine has no shortage of men, but we have to join and be a part of this war."

Many of the volunteers were already living in Ukraine, either for work or seeking refuge from political oppression back home. Some volunteers have struggled with visas and residency permits, while their eagerness to join the fight has aroused suspicions among some Ukrainian officials and commanders, who are on high alert for saboteurs.

But the volunteers seem to be finding their place. Mr. Madiyev, a veteran of two wars in Chechnya against Moscow, was an associate of Dzhokhar Dudayev, the former Soviet general who led Chechnya's bid for independence from Russia in the 1990s. Exiled from Chechnya, Mr. Madiyev settled in Ukraine in 2016.

His battalion, named for the late Chechen leader, is one of several Chechen units that have joined Ukraine in its fight against Russia in recent years, following the 2014 uprising of Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. Mr. Madiyev declined to reveal how many active fighters he had, saying simply, "We have enough."

He spoke about the Russian invasion the way many Ukrainians do, saying that if Moscow is not stopped in Ukraine, it will threaten many more countries of Europe.

But the younger fighters in his battalion take things further.

"Our aim is the liberation of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria," a Chechen fighter said, using the name of the erstwhile self-declared republic, "and to help all the nations who want it, to gain freedom." In accordance with military protocol, he gave only his code name, Maga.

The Chechens are only one example of numerous ethnic-based battalions and regiments that have been forming in Ukraine since Russia's invasion last February.

Fighters from Belarus have formed a regiment thousands strong. Other volunteers come from the Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as from ethnic minorities that have large populations in Russia: Chechens, Tatars and Turkic-speaking groups.

Most of them are motivated by historic grievances of dispossession and suppression by Moscow. Chechens and Tatars were among many groups that were decimated by forcible deportations under Stalin in the 1940s.

There is also a smattering of Russian exiles, among them Russian nationalists and neo-Nazis who are opposed to Mr. Putin. A thousands-strong regiment of Belarusians includes many opponents of the country's president, Aleksandr G. Lukashenko.

Their participation in the war may be useful for Ukraine, but it is also a potentially explosive issue for the Kyiv government because most of them harbor long-term political ambitions to return home and overthrow the Russian and Belarusian governments. Ukrainian military officials declined to comment on their use of the volunteer groups, while a spokesman for the Ukrainian security service, the S.B.U., said it was not responsible for managing them.

But the volunteers themselves say that they are acting with the full knowledge and under the orders of the Ukrainian Army and intelligence services. Many of their operations are covert, including dangerous reconnaissance or sabotage missions behind Russian lines.

In response to an appeal by Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, early in the war, thousands of volunteers poured in from Western countries, including the United States and Britain. Most joined the International Legion, which has been recognized by the Ukrainian government and, to some extent, integrated into the Ukrainian Army.

At a news briefing last month, Ukraine's defense minister, Oleksii Reznikov, said there were ideological and political benefits to having foreign soldiers fighting alongside Ukrainians in defense of European values.

Foreign soldiers were also gaining valuable experience, he added: "The experience of the modern war here, the war of technologies, drone war and electronic warfare. So I think it's a win-win exchange."

But the volunteers from former Soviet republics are, in many ways, even more useful.

They have a linguistic advantage because most speak Russian, which is widely spoken in Ukraine, and sometimes Ukrainian, making coordination with the Ukrainian military easier. And some, like a group of Georgians in the Kavkaz Legion, have battlefield experience, having served with the NATO-led force in Afghanistan.

Their knowledge of Russia and Russians, and their hatred of Moscow, has made the volunteers good undercover operators for Kyiv. Some Ukrainian officials and lawmakers have even expressed support for their causes. In October, for example, the Ukrainian Parliament passed a motion recognizing the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria as a territory occupied by Russia.

But they also face substantial risks, given the nature of their work behind enemy lines. Not just Russian nationals, but virtually any undercover soldiers captured by Russian forces would be dealt with harshly.

One of the more recently formed volunteer battalions, Turan, is composed of Turkic-speaking ethnic groups from the Caucasus, Central Asia and Russia. It is led by a refugee from Kyrgyzstan, Almaz Kudabek, who had worked as a barber on American bases in his home country and in the Afghan city of Kandahar.

He says he has recruited Azerbaijanis, Tatars and Chinese Uyghurs to the group, and he talks passionately about the marginalization and oppression of Turkic-speaking minorities in Russia. He said that Moscow had unfairly drawn conscripts for the war predominantly from remote and poorer regions of Russia, including those populated by Turkic-speaking ethnic minorities, who have been killed in far greater numbers than ethnic Russians.

But Mr. Kudabek said members of his unit could turn that injustice to their advantage, infiltrating Russian-occupied territory on sabotage missions and even passing themselves off as Russian soldiers.

"We just want to fight Russians," he said. "We know what they are."

Despite their evident value to the Ukrainian military, the commanders of ethnic battalions complained of a lack of support from Kyiv. The Chechen battalion leader, Mr. Madiyev, said that beyond weapons and ammunition, the units have to provide for their own food, fuel and equipment.

	<p>The leader of a Russian regiment, a far-right nationalist who uses the code name White Rex, said he ran into multiple obstacles when he formed the unit shortly after the Russians invaded.</p> <p>Although he and his fellow volunteers had lived in Ukraine for several years, they were initially met with suspicion from Ukrainians on edge about Russian saboteurs. “We were held at gunpoint,” he said. “We had many funny, and not so funny, encounters, but I was determined to have this regiment.”</p> <p>But they have also found support among Ukrainians.</p> <p>A Ukrainian volunteer group, Bratstvo, eventually helped the Russian regiment find a role for itself not so dissimilar from the other ethnic battalions, operating behind Russian lines and carrying out reconnaissance and sabotage missions for the Ukrainian Army.</p> <p>Minutes before setting out on a night mission recently, White Rex said his aim had always been to find a way to return home to Russia. But he said the war had taught him that the way to return to Russia was to overthrow Mr. Putin and his government.</p> <p>“The Russian Volunteer Corps marches in and destroys the current government — that’s the only way,” he said. “You cannot persuade a tyrant to leave, and any other force would be seen as invaders.”</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/07 WASPC priorities legislative session</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.chronline.com/stories/state-association-of-sheriffs-and-police-chiefs-announces-priorities-for-legislative-session,306593">https://www.chronline.com/stories/state-association-of-sheriffs-and-police-chiefs-announces-priorities-for-legislative-session,306593</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>The Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC) released a statement Thursday announcing its priorities for the upcoming state legislative session.</p> <p>Three out of its four listed priorities for the 2023 session involve revising police accountability measures passed by the Legislature last year.</p> <p>“We believe in balanced public safety laws that support the core functions of government in an environment where the men and women of law enforcement reflect and care for their communities while having the tools to care for victims in their pursuit of justice,” WASPC stated in a written statement. “We encourage bipartisan cooperation to enact laws that protect our communities and get people the help they need. Crime is rising, more people are being victimized and there are not enough resources available to those in need.</p> <p>The organization, which represents executive and top management personnel from law enforcement agencies statewide, wrote it intends to “work for nonpartisan, constructive reform, and measures to improve public trust and protect victims.”</p> <p>Elaborating, WASPC wrote, “Public safety laws should support balanced outcomes and help victims of crime, support law enforcement, and hold offenders accountable. Crime doesn't know politics and public safety should not be a partisan issue.”</p> <p>WASPC added, “Moving forward together, we can refine Washington laws to improve trust, accountability, and transparency. We can bring our communities together and promote the safety of all Washingtonians.”</p> <p>Below are WASPC’s legislative priorities for the upcoming session, which begins Jan. 9. More information about the association is available at <a href="https://www.waspc.org/">https://www.waspc.org/</a>.</p> <p><b>Drug Laws</b></p>



Background: The Washington state Supreme Court ruled in February 2021 that the state's long-standing drug possession law was unconstitutional because it punished those who unknowingly had drugs in their possession. The court's ruling in the case, *State v. Blake*, rendered the state's main drug possession statute (RCW 69.50.4013(1)) null and void and thus decriminalized basic drug possession pending the adoption of a replacement statute. While the original statute classified drug possession as a felony, the Legislature passed a stopgap law during last year's session that offered offenders treatment for the first two drug possession offenses and charged them with a misdemeanor on the third offense.

Lawmakers plan to act on the issue in the 2023 legislative session, since the stopgap law expires June 1. WASPC: "The effects of the Washington Supreme Court *Blake* decision and legislative changes to our drug laws tolerated personal drug possession and made harmful and dangerous drugs essentially legal to possess across the state. The legislative response to the *Blake* decision has made it far easier for those who sell drugs to prey on victims and has brought chaos to public spaces. Drug related crime, such as retail theft, has increased greatly. We support policies that provide incentives to encourage drug rehabilitation and treatment while holding those who are in unlawful possession of drugs accountable in a compassionate manner. We must break the cycle of drug abuse, provide help to individuals in need, and take back our public spaces for our community and our businesses. Behavioral and mental health services need to be strengthened with resources to hire more people who can address this crisis."

### **Pursuits**

Background: Among the 11 police accountability bills passed by the state Legislature in 2021 was a law, now known as RCW 10.116.060, that restricted the conditions in which an officer can engage in a vehicular pursuit. The intent behind the law was to limit the number of deaths that happen during police pursuits. Under the law, an officer can pursue a suspect if the officer has probable cause the suspect committed a violent or sexual crime or is driving under the influence. Since the law went into effect over the summer, local law enforcement agencies have reported an increase in subjects driving recklessly to elude officers.

WASPC: "Law enforcement will be the first to recognize that car chase pursuits can be dangerous. Recent policies restricting pursuits made driving a car a 'get out of jail free' card and creates conditions that empower criminals, jeopardize public safety, and diminishes the rule of law in Washington. We can fix the pursuit law to fall in line with Washington state's duty of care standards and enable more discretion in engaging in police vehicle pursuits in a manner that offers a balance between the risk of the pursuit versus the reasons(s) for the pursuit. Severe prohibitions on vehicular pursuits need to be reversed. When not arresting the suspect outweighs the risk of the pursuit, officers need the option to pursue criminals to ensure public safety. We can't allow offenders the advantage over victims and to just drive away."

### **Recruitment and Retention**

Background: Many police chiefs and sheriffs across the country report staffing levels have not rebounded from a wave of resignations that started with the pandemic and the 2020 unrest, according to reporting by the New York Times. The Seattle Police Department reported a 30-year low in officers in July 2022 and locally, the Lewis County Sheriff's Office, the Centralia Police Department and the Chehalis Police Department have all reported staffing shortages in recent years.

WASPC: "For more than a dozen years, Washington has had the fewest law enforcement officers per capita, ranking 51st in the nation. In 2021, that ratio declined even further. We need to act quickly to catch up with the growth of our region. Today, our state has 500 fewer officers than it did a year ago. That affects prevention and response time to 911 calls and increases stress on our remaining police officers. De-escalation, proactive policing, and supervision require resources to 'team up and slow down.' Every community deserves a public safety agency that is well-trained, well-equipped, and well-staffed to deliver the best public service. Our communities need funds to recruit and retain additional officers. We support effective solutions that will provide local governments with more resources for criminal justice services in ways that won't raise existing taxes."

### **Juvenile Justice**

	<p>Background: Another police reform law passed by the Legislature in 2021, RCW 13.40.740, requires law enforcement to connect a youth 18 years old or younger with a lawyer before the youth is questioned by law enforcement in connection with a crime, and when law enforcement detain a youth or request that the youth consent to a search of their person or property. The youth's parents cannot waive this right on the youth's behalf. The law allows law enforcement to speak with youth without connecting them to legal counsel if law enforcement believe the youth is a trafficking victim or if the youth's life is in imminent danger.</p> <p>WASPC: "Kids should have a choice. By removing a parent's choice to allow their children to talk to the police and removing a juvenile's choice, the current laws are preventing both from fully taking advantage of circumstances where law enforcement is trying to help. These laws prevent juveniles from talking about an investigation with law enforcement officers, taking away opportunities to declare their innocence or offer helpful information to an investigation. In some cases, these laws have led to more youth being charged with crimes, sometimes tragic outcomes. The current laws direct with whom juveniles can speak without including the choice of them or their parents. This creates an unfortunate outcome with more law enforcement cases filed, increasing the number of juveniles in the criminal justice system. Positive intervention between our communities' kids and law enforcement is a good, healthy, and helpful tool to reduce crime."</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Spokane PD to place more officers on patrol</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.krem.com/article/news/crime/spokane-police-patrol-restructure/293-9dc6ccfc-9f7f-49d8-a9b0-ffef95a806c7">https://www.krem.com/article/news/crime/spokane-police-patrol-restructure/293-9dc6ccfc-9f7f-49d8-a9b0-ffef95a806c7</a>
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — The Spokane Police Department (SPD) announced a <a href="#">restructure to its current staffing model</a> on Thursday.</p> <p>Beginning Jan. 8, SPD will put more officers on patrol in Spokane neighborhoods. Both Mayor Nadine Woodward and SPD Chief Craig Meidl said their number one priority is public safety.</p> <p>"I was approached by several lieutenants and captains who told me that our officers were not satisfied with the level of service that they're providing to the community," Meidl said.</p> <p>The restructuring has been in talks for more than a year, according to Meidl. SPD said it will increase the number of patrol officers on the streets, which will reduce response times to calls and allow "more proactive time" for officers.</p> <p>"Instead of being reactive, our goal is to try to give them more opportunity to be proactive within the community as well," Meidl said.</p> <p>In addition to putting more officers on the streets, Meidl said the restructuring will reduce burnout amongst SPD staff. In 2022, SPD received an average of 273 calls each day, a 6% increase from 2021.</p> <p>"It also will increase officer morale by reducing fatigue of the officers, by reducing the burnout and ideally reducing overtime by reducing the amount of mandatory overtime that we have to implement to ensure that we're meeting our minimum staffing levels," Meidl said.</p> <p>Along with increased patrol, another important goal of the restructure is being able to respond to calls quicker.</p> <p>"I would say our goal, the simple answer is as quickly as we can, and have officers available so that when that call comes in, the longest delay is just the officer driving from point A to point B, that would be the ultimate goal," Meidl said.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Housing, homeless top priority legislature</b>
----------	---

SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/housing-homelessness-crisis-to-be-a-priority-for-state-lawmakers-this-year-2023-governor-jay-inslee-housed-senate-encampment-proposal-washington-seattle-tacoma-legislative-process-funds-government-nonprofit-suarez#">https://komonews.com/news/local/housing-homelessness-crisis-to-be-a-priority-for-state-lawmakers-this-year-2023-governor-jay-inslee-housed-senate-encampment-proposal-washington-seattle-tacoma-legislative-process-funds-government-nonprofit-suarez#</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE, Wash. — On Monday, Washington law makers will begin the process of mapping out 2023 and what will be top of mind as this year's legislative session begins.</p> <p>Housing and the homelessness crisis are once again receiving a focus.</p> <p>Governor Jay Inslee has a <a href="#">4-billion-dollar proposal</a>, to address housing.</p> <p>Sharon Lee with the Low Income Housing Institute in Seattle, said this is an important priority for the state.</p> <p>"We have this terrible situation of really high housing costs, not enough affordable housing and this expanding growing homeless population. We have so many people living unsheltered, people living under cars, people who can't really afford to rent," Lee said.</p> <p>The governor is also looking to put money towards more clean-ups of <a href="#">encampments along state right of ways</a>, like highways and interstates.</p> <p>"People are on on-ramps, off-ramps, under bridges, I-5, I-90. It's ridiculous to have people sleeping on state property, so the idea that you can provide immediate housing, you can buy buildings, you can re-purpose underutilized hotels and get people safe and off these dangerous locations," Lee said.</p> <p>There is also legislation that has been introduced, like <a href="#">Senate Bill 5016</a>, which relates to "addressing homelessness through providing emergency shelter, incentivizing employment of workers experiencing homelessness, and building homes for a better future," according to the bill's text.</p> <p>Among other functions the bill aims to help local governments and nonprofits, "subject to the availability of funds appropriated for this specific purpose, the department must provide grants to local governments or nonprofit organizations to meet the individual needs of persons experiencing homelessness to facilitate their transition to permanent housing."</p> <p>Andrea Suarez, the executive director of the organization 'We Heart Seattle,' which aims to help those who are homeless, said:</p> <p><i>[they are] gratified that the issue of homelessness, along with public safety (including crime and drug use) are front and center on the 2023 WA State legislative agenda. As a non-profit, boots-on-the-ground organization providing outreach and trash clean up as a means of harm reduction, we witness daily the need for a coordinated response to homelessness - and when we say "coordinated" we do not just mean regarding housing. Solutions must be policy and budgetarily-driven but more importantly humanitarian and practically focused. There is no one-stop answer - housing first, for example, will not solve homelessness in our state or anywhere. What is key is prioritizing friction-free, compassionate, addiction and mental health services along with strong, cross-functional coordinated work among the network of stakeholders - publicly AND privately funded. We emphasize the latter and urge our legislators to embrace the power of the people - civic engagement along with an investment in services is critical.</i></p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	01/07 XBB.1.5 variant in Pacific Northwest
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/covid-19-coronavirus-new-variant-xbb15-strain-university-washington-medicine-united-states-pacific-northwest-washington-state-western-seattle-northeast-infection-cdc-science#">https://komonews.com/news/local/covid-19-coronavirus-new-variant-xbb15-strain-university-washington-medicine-united-states-pacific-northwest-washington-state-western-seattle-northeast-infection-cdc-science#</a>
GIST	A new COVID-19 variant has quickly become one of the most common causes of coronavirus infections in the United States.

	<p>The variant, designated XBB.1.5 — an offshoot of the omicron subvariant — first made its way through the Northeast and has now entered the Pacific Northwest.</p> <p>"It is expected to soon become the dominant strain in this geographical area," <a href="#">University of Washington Medicine</a> said in a news release.</p> <p>UW Medicine called XBB.1.5 a "highly transmissible strain." According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, XBB.1.5 accounts for an estimated 71.6% of new COVID infections in the U.S., <a href="#">ABC News reported</a>.</p> <p>The UW Medicine Clinical Virology Lab will monitor the strain for several months.</p> <p>Dr. Stuart Campbell Ray, an infectious disease expert at Johns Hopkins University, said XBB.1.5 attaches more tightly than its competitors to a receptor that allows viruses to enter a cell, <a href="#">The Associated Press reported</a>.</p> <p>Scientists said the virus will surely keep evolving — which is why they need to keep searching for new variants. The coronavirus is like a predator stalking humanity, Ray said, and “the predator adapts to the prey.”</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 USPS mail delivery issues on Vashon Island</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/residents-fed-up-mail-delivery-issues-continue-vashon-island/7W5D7OOU25FN3M5M3I5SKGM4WY/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/residents-fed-up-mail-delivery-issues-continue-vashon-island/7W5D7OOU25FN3M5M3I5SKGM4WY/</a>
GIST	<p>VASHON, Wash. — Mail woes continue on Vashon Island, where some residents say they wait weeks or sometimes months for their mail to be delivered.</p> <p>Residents there join a growing list of communities in western Washington that say they’re experiencing major delays from the U.S. Postal Service.</p> <p>Jim Garrison is just one of the many Vashon Island residents who said they had lost faith in their local post office.</p> <p>“It’s insane. We’re living in a third-world country all of a sudden,” said Garrison. “I had insurance documents mailed to me that didn’t come for two and a half months. I don’t know where they were. Whether they were sitting in that post office or sitting in some post office in Seattle. ”</p> <p>Residents report a mail lag that goes back months but has been exacerbated by the holiday season.</p> <p>Some are still waiting on Christmas presents.</p> <p>“They’re going on Amazon, for example, and they’re seeing that it’s scheduled to be delivered today, so they’re expecting their packages to show up, like pre-Christmas. A lot of that did not happen,” said David Mish, who also lives on Vashon Island.</p> <p>Others anxiously wait for deliveries of medicine, diapers and propane items that they’ve tracked online to the postal facility on Vashon, but then radio silence — no delivery for weeks.</p> <p>Residents alerted KIRO 7 to pallets of mail stored outdoors behind the post office, where they’re exposed to the elements.</p> <p>Sending mail is also an issue. Residents say there’s often an hours-long line inside the post office.</p> <p>A representative with the USPS credits these frustrations to staffing issues but tells KIRO 7 that the agency is actively hiring.</p>

	<p>It also plans to temporarily relocate postal workers from other offices to Vashon in hopes that it will help alleviate some issues.</p> <p>Residents agree that local post workers need help.</p> <p>“I’m not blaming the local people, the employees here. I think they’re doing the best they can,” said Garrison. “But there’s something happening on the upper levels that is really messed up.”</p> <p>Residents say they’ve started reaching out to their local representatives to try to find a solution, and a community meeting is scheduled to discuss the mail delays on Jan. 19.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Legislative session starts Monday</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/politics/state-politics/2023-washington-state-legislative-session-monday/281-627a6746-072b-4512-81ee-bacbd470ff0f">https://www.king5.com/article/news/politics/state-politics/2023-washington-state-legislative-session-monday/281-627a6746-072b-4512-81ee-bacbd470ff0f</a>
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. — Washington state legislative leaders appeared largely aligned with Democratic Gov. Jay Inslee in citing homelessness and a significant housing shortage as top priorities for the legislative session starting Monday in Olympia.</p> <p>Leaders of both parties in an annual meeting with reporters Thursday said they’re concerned about the housing shortage as well as a workforce shortage affecting all areas of Washingtonian's lives from child care to education to health care.</p> <p>The 105-day session will also be the first to happen fully in person since the COVID-19 pandemic. The bulk of lawmakers' work will be to finalize a new two-year state budget.</p> <p>Democratic House Speaker Laurie Jenkins said she thinks the residents of Washington have spoken in sending Democratic-led majorities back to the Legislature to focus on areas of housing and homelessness, along with behavioral health, community safety and protecting abortion rights.</p> <p>“We're looking forward to leading the way, hopefully in a bipartisan way,” she said.</p> <p>House Republican Leader J.T. Wilcox of Yelm said it seems like Republicans and Democrats are poised this session to come together specifically on housing issues.</p> <p>Rep. Andrew Barkis, R-Olympia, is “partnering with Democrats to find as much common ground as we possibly can to make sure that we address all of the roadblocks that make it hard to add to our inventory of housing,” Wilcox said.</p> <p>Inslee proposed in December that state spending prioritize housing, including an effort to build thousands of units that would require approval from the Legislature and Washington voters. He's proposing the state raise \$4 billion by issuing bonds outside the state’s debt limit.</p> <p>“It is making an investment that actually produces an asset,” Inslee said. “We get something for our money, which is housing.”</p> <p>The additional money would pay for over 5,000 housing units between 2023 and 2025 and 19,000 in the following six years and would pay for supportive services such as counseling. Nearly 13,000 people are living unsheltered throughout Washington state — up from more than 10,500 in 2020, according to the state’s 2022 Point in Time Count.</p> <p>Inslee said Thursday he believes Washingtonians want action at a scale that will actually achieve meaningful progress on homelessness and this proposal does that.</p>

	<p>“We need to do this now ... it's not acceptable for the next 20 or 30 years to have this squalor as a blight on the state of Washington and put so many people who are experiencing homelessness into terrible living situations,” he said.</p> <p>Inslee’s proposed budget would spend \$70 billion over two years starting in July 2023. It also focuses on issues including mental and behavioral health care, the environment and public safety.</p> <p>The House and Senate will release their own budget proposals in the coming weeks.</p> <p>Legislative leaders also talked about ways to address a worker shortage in nearly every industry at least partly because of members of the large baby boomer generation retiring.</p> <p>Senate Republican Leader John Braun and others mentioned possibly expanding training opportunities, increasing apprenticeships, and easing licensing requirements in some fields.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

## Cyber, Tech Awareness

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	01/09 FCC spam numbers list of unwanted calls
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2023/01/09/spam-numbers-list-of-unwanted-calls-reported-to-federal-communications-commission/10940959002/">https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2023/01/09/spam-numbers-list-of-unwanted-calls-reported-to-federal-communications-commission/10940959002/</a>
GIST	<p>You pick up the phone and hear, “We’ve been trying to reach you concerning your vehicle's extended warranty.” It’s a pre-recorded message, and it instructs you to press a certain number or stay on the line. Don’t fall for it. It’s probably a scam.</p> <p>More than 2 million individual <a href="#">consumer complaints</a> have been filed in the past eight years with the Consumer Help Center from the <a href="#">Federal Communications Commission</a>, which handles a wide range of telecommunications service and billing issues.</p> <p>Unwanted calls are the single largest source for those complaints.</p> <p>At least 55% of all the reports filed to the FCC are due to unwanted calls, including telemarketing and robocalls, according to a USA TODAY analysis.</p> <p>The searchable database (above) reflects 808,342 unwanted calls consumers reported to the FCC in the past eight years.</p> <p>Those represent only 60% of all unwanted call complaints because many phone customers did not report a number from caller ID. Factoring in repeats for the same phone line, the database contains 551,345 unique numbers.</p> <p>Being listed in the database doesn't necessarily mean a caller is up to no good. The FCC doesn't investigate or resolve those individual complaints but instead uses them to help inform FCC enforcement and policy work.</p> <p>Nonetheless, a robocall trying to sell something via consumers' wireless or wireline phones is always illegal unless the company has obtained written or oral permission from them. There are only a few exceptions such as emergency calls regarding danger to life or safety that are made to either wireless or landline numbers, or market research, or polling calls via wireline numbers only.</p> <p>More unwanted call reports are kept by the <a href="#">Federal Trade Commission</a>, which maintains a Do Not Call Registry and takes complaints.</p>



### **Who is calling?**

“Most of those unwanted calls are from scammers trying to defraud people and calling on behalf of IRS, DHS, and different companies or from people selling unwanted services such as car warranties,” said Ragib Hasan, tenured Associate Professor at the Department of Computer Science at the University of Alabama at Birmingham whose research is focused on cloud computing and systems security.

Since 2015, the FCC has received an annual average of 171,223 unwanted telephone call complaints. The top reason for those complaints is automobile warranty renewal robocalls. Those calls often included specific information about the user's car and warranty that made the call seem legitimate, according to the [FCC website](#).

Other consumer complaints received by the FCC involve lawsuits and criminal charges scam calls, social security number phishing, and insurance or healthcare-related calls.

Many of those robocalls originate overseas. In 2021, the Industry Traceback Group reported that 65% of the voice service providers identified as transmitting illegal robocalls were either foreign-based or gateway providers.

"Scam calls often originate overseas and route through shady telecom services," said Jonathan Mayer, an assistant professor at Princeton University, with appointments in the Department of Computer Science.

### **How many calls are we talking about?**

In addition to the FCC, the Federal Trade Commission takes complaints that touch on unwanted calls. The complaints taken by either agency are just the tip of the iceberg.

“Most individuals never submit a complaint to the FCC or FTC’s DoNotCall registry for violations,” Hasan said. “Either they don’t know the complaint process or they find it a hassle.”

The Federal Trade Commission's [tracking of imposter scams](#) shows that from last January through the third quarter of 2022, it received 229,494 reports of phone call fraud, with nearly \$590 million in reported money lost.

The FTC's [Do Not Call Registry](#) allows users to register their numbers to stop sales calls from real companies. After the number is on the registry for 31 days, people can report unwanted sales calls. The [Registry](#) received 935 complaints per 100,000 people from October 2021 through September 2022, and over 60% of those were robocalls.

YouMail, a private company that provides robocall-blocking software, has created a [Robocall Index](#) that estimates monthly robocall volume. It reported 4.3 billion robocalls in December alone. That is equivalent to 136.6 million calls a day and an average of 13 calls per person.

### **How to block spam calls and robocallers**

An FCC tipsheet tells people: “If you answer the phone and the caller - or a recording - asks you to hit a button to stop getting the calls, you should just hang up.”

The government-approved way to stop unwanted calls from legitimate companies is to add your name to the FTC's [Do Not Call Registry](#).

Experts also recommend looking into call-blocking tools such as [YouMail](#) and [RoboKiller](#).

### **Why are unwanted calls dangerous?**

Recorded phone pitches don't reach people at random, experts say.

“Some of those campaigns are extremely targeted,” said Alex Quilici, CEO of YouMail, a private company that provides robocall-blocking software. “Medicare robocall scams target 65-year-olds and

over, the student loans scammers tended to call 25 to 45-year-olds, and sometimes they may even have specific lists of people that bought a particular medical device for example.”

Experts agree that scammers are likely to identify potential victims by trolling the Internet and searching for lists of people with something in common. They tend to target vulnerable people and utilize psychological mind tricks to play with their insecurities and scam them.

“Scam calls disproportionately target vulnerable populations, and I believe the most dangerous unwanted calls are those preying on a specific demographic,” said Christian Wartchow, CEO of CyberSecure IT Solutions which serves Southwest Florida. “We see an awful lot of elderly victims on a weekly basis that receives calls from impostors impersonating Amazon or Spectrum agents and stealing personal information.”

#### **What is the FCC doing about it?**

FCC has been trying to crack down on unwanted calls for years now. The agency took aggressive enforcement action against telemarketers for apparently illegal caller ID spoofing and robocalling. In addition, agency regulators required telecom services to implement forms of call authentication and to block calls from non-compliant services.

In 2017, the FCC authorized voice service providers to block certain calls that appear to be from “invalid, unallocated, or unused numbers.” Two years later, the [TRACED Act](#) was passed, requiring every provider to file a robocall mitigation plan and to verify that the caller ID information transmitted with each call matches the caller’s real phone number.

“FCC has done a lot, and we’ve seen we’re already seeing scam calls decline a little bit, which is good, said Quilici.

But the threat remains strong, said Quilici, “because scammers are getting smarter, and calls are being way more targeted.”

"Consumers," he said, "need to take the necessary steps to protect themselves."

[Return to Top](#)

***See if someone's complained about a number***

*[If you cannot see a data search tool below, click here.](#)*

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Phishing attacks target Moldova govt.</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://therecord.media/moldova%ca%bcs-government-hit-by-flood-of-phishing-attacks/">https://therecord.media/moldova%ca%bcs-government-hit-by-flood-of-phishing-attacks/</a>
GIST	<p>Moldova’s government institutions have been hit by a wave of phishing attacks — the latest cyber assault on the country since it pledged support for Ukraine in its defense against Russia.</p> <p>Hackers have sent more than 1,330 emails to accounts belonging to the country’s state services, Moldova’s cybersecurity regulator <a href="#">announced</a> on Thursday. In one campaign, emails contained a message about the alleged expiration of the .md government domain and instructed users to follow a malicious link leading to a fake payment page to renew it.</p> <p>The phishing emails were sent on behalf of the website hosting company Alexhost, according to email samples published on the Moldovan Information Technology and Cyber Security Service (STISC) website.</p> <p>The company <a href="#">warned</a> its users about the phishing campaign on Monday. “Someone is using the name of our company without any consent,” the statement said. “Alexhost takes this seriously and will act.”</p> <p>Following the phishing incidents, the company said it would start asking its customers to check invoices before making any payments.</p>

	<p>Moldova’s cybersecurity regulator did not disclose whether the phishing campaigns were successful and how many state institutions were affected. It is also not clear who is behind these attacks and if the perpetrators were nation-state hackers or unaffiliated ransomware gangs. The regulator did not respond to The Record’s request for comment.</p> <p>Over the past year, Moldova <a href="#">has witnessed</a> a sharp increase in cyberattacks, likely in connection to the country’s support of Ukraine during the war with Russia.</p> <p>In November, a newly-registered website called Moldova Leaks released private Telegram conversations purportedly involving prominent Moldovan political figures, sparking a political scandal.</p> <p>The Moldovan president’s office claimed the content of the conversations was fake, but the leak <a href="#">indicates</a> the probable interference of Russian hackers and intelligence services in the country’s internal politics.</p> <p>In October, hackers targeted 80 Moldovan state computer systems with distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks, though with limited success, according to STISC.</p> <p>Earlier in August, the pro-Russian hacker group Killnet <a href="#">announced</a> a week-long hacking campaign against Moldova. Before that, Killnet announced cyberattacks on other countries supporting Ukraine in the war with Russia.</p> <p>From the first days of the war, Moldova condemned Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and has provided shelter for Ukrainian refugees. More than 645,000 Ukrainians have fled to Moldova as of December 12.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Cybercrooks exploiting ChatGPT</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/emerging-technology/cybercriminals-are-already-using-chatgpt-to-own-you">https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/emerging-technology/cybercriminals-are-already-using-chatgpt-to-own-you</a>
GIST	<p>When ChatGPT — OpenAI’s large language model interface — released to the public late last year, it was <a href="#">immediately apparent</a> to many in the information security community that the tool could (in theory) be leveraged by cybercriminals in a variety of ways.</p> <p>Now, new <a href="#">findings</a> from Check Point Research indicates that this is no longer a hypothetical threat.</p> <p>According to the company, underground hacking forums on the dark web are already awash in real-world examples of cybercriminals attempting to use the program for malicious purposes, creating infostealers, encryption tools and phishing lures to use in hacking and fraud campaigns. There are even examples of actors using it in more creative ways, like developing cryptocurrency payment systems with real-time currency trackers to add onto dark web marketplaces, or using it to generate AI art to sell on Etsy and other online platforms.</p> <p>Sergey Shykevich, a threat intelligence manager at Check Point Research, told SC Media while most of the examples they found aligned with how they expected cybercriminals to use the program, the sheer speed of that adoption was head-turning.</p> <p>“I think maybe the only really surprising thing is that it happened much faster than I thought it would happen. I didn’t think that within two to three weeks we would already see malicious tools and other stuff on the underground,” he said.</p> <p>In one forum, a cybercriminal boasted about recreating malware strains and hacking techniques by prompting ChatGPT with publicly available writeups, including a Python-based file stealer. Check Point researchers confirmed that the tool, while basic, does in fact work as advertised. The actor was also able to use a single snippet of Java code to create a modular Powershell script capable of running real malware programs from a variety of different families.</p>

While this particular actor has previously demonstrated technical proficiency, making it easier for script kids to carry out more dangerous and high-level attacks was one of the chief fears around the emergence of ChatGPT. Here too, there is evidence that this is more than a theoretical possibility.

In another example, a separate actor relayed that they were able to create a Python-based script for encrypting and decrypting files, with the kicker being the admission that they had no previous coding experience and this was the first script they had ever written. Again, analysis by Check Point researchers found that while the program was benign on its own, it was, indeed, functional and could be “easily modified” to completely encrypt a computer’s files, similar to ransomware.

While this particular actor (who posts under the handle USDoD) seems to have a low level of technical skill, Check Point notes that they are nevertheless a respected member of the community. In fact, it appears to be the same actor who was observed advertising a database of stolen FBI InfraGard member information for sale last month.

There are also examples of other creative uses of the program to facilitate a variety of fraud-based activities. Another user was able to create a PHP-based add-on to process cryptocurrency payments (with trackers built in to keep track of the latest price for each currency) for a dark web marketplace, quipping that for those who “have no knowledge no f\*\*king problem.”

The user made it clear that the purpose of the post was to help “skids” (a shortened version of “script kiddies” or hackers with little to no technical knowledge) develop their own dark web marketplace.

“This article is more or less to discuss abuse and being a lazy ass skid who doesn’t wanna be bothered to learn languages like python, Javascript or how to create a basic web page,” the user wrote.

As always, there are caveats and limitations to consider. The tools created thus far are rather basic, but information security professionals have always predicted that AI-programs would be most effective at automating lower-level tooling and functions that help hackers break into systems and socially engineer victims. It’s also clear that at least some of the criminals observed have little to no development experience, demonstrating how ChatGPT may have limited use cases thus far to higher-end actors.

Further, Shykevich said ChatGPT still works best when prompted in English, and they haven’t seen many examples thus far of similar experimentation from Russian-speaking cybercriminals, but even they will eventually find it useful for generating things like more convincing and English-fluent phishing lures, which has long been a barrier for many Russian hackers.

But it also demonstrates how much easier it can make it for low-level actors to develop the tools and knowledge to carry out more intermediate-level hacks. Technically, there are controls built into the program by OpenAI to prevent using it for straightforwardly malicious ends, but many of those controls can be easily bypassed through creative prompting.

“If they can create a script of malware without knowing a single line of code ... if someone can just say we want a program that will do ABCD, and they get it now, that’s on the really kind of bad side, because everyone can do it now and the entry level to become a cybercriminal becomes extremely low,” said Shykevich.

The experimentation by criminals has also led to something of a cat and mouse game. Shykevich said an hour after their post was published, OpenAI built in new controls designed to limit ChatGPT’s ability to provide such information.

But ChatGPT’s publicly available nature means that it is essentially open to crowdsourced attempts at manipulating and bypassing these controls. Shykevich believes that while it will eventually get to a point where it’s much harder to openly defy ChatGPT security controls, he thinks OpenAI should consider developing some kind of authorization program that would either block a user after making a certain

	<p>number of attempts to circumvent those controls or provide a digital signature that could be used by OpenAI or law enforcement to trace back strains of malware or other malicious acts to a specific user or computer.</p> <p>Or, OpenAI's program may travel a similar journey as online payment systems, which were open to all kinds of abuses when they were first introduced to the public but were slowly made safer through the addition and tweaking of enhanced policies and controls.</p> <p>Until then, he expects the cat and mouse game to continue, and for malicious actors to develop even more use cases and applications in the next few months.</p> <p>"I think there will be 'exciting' times in the next two-to-three months is when we will really start seeing maybe more sophisticated things and [hacking campaigns] in the wild that are using ChatGPT," he said.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 Fake Pokemon NFT game installer</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fake-pokemon-nft-game-installer-lets-hackers-hijack-your-pc/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fake-pokemon-nft-game-installer-lets-hackers-hijack-your-pc/</a>
GIST	<p>Threat actors are using a well-crafted Pokemon NFT card game website to distribute the NetSupport remote access tool and take control over victims' devices.</p> <p>The website "pokemon-go[.]io," which is still online at the time of writing, claims to be home to a new NFT card game built around the Pokemon franchise, offering users strategic fun together with NFT investment profits.</p> <p>Considering the popularity of both Pokemon and NFTs, it shouldn't be hard for the operators of the malicious portal to draw an audience to the site through malspam, social media posts, etc.</p> <p>Those who click on the "Play on PC" button download an executable that looks like a legitimate game installer but, in reality, installs the NetSupport remote access tool (RAT) on the victim's system.</p> <p>The operation was uncovered by analysts at <a href="#">ASEC</a>, who reports there was also a second site used in the campaign, at "beta-pokemoncards[.]io," but it has since been taken offline.</p> <p>This campaign's first signs of activity appeared in December 2022, while earlier samples retrieved from VirusTotal showed that the same operators pushed a fake Visual Studio file instead of the Pokemon game.</p> <p><b>Dropping the NetSupport RAT</b></p> <p>The NetSupport RAT executable ("client32.exe") and its dependencies are installed in a new folder in the %APPDATA% path. They are set to "hidden" to help evade detection from victims performing manual inspections on the file system.</p> <p>Moreover, the installer creates an entry in the Windows Startup folder to ensure the RAT will execute upon system boot.</p> <p>As NetSupport RAT (NetSupport Manager) is a legitimate program, threat actors commonly use it in the hopes it will evade security software.</p> <p>The threat actors can now remotely connect to a user's device to steal data, install other malware, or even attempt to spread further on the network.</p> <p>While NetSupport Manager is a legitimate software product, it is commonly used by threat actors as part of their malicious campaigns.</p>

	<p>In 2020, <a href="#">Microsoft warned</a> about phishing actors using COVID-19-themed Excel files that dropped NetSupport RAT onto the recipients' computers.</p> <p>In August 2022, a <a href="#">campaign targeting WordPress sites</a> with fake Cloudflare DDoS protection pages installed NetSupport RAT and Raccoon Stealer on victims.</p> <p>NetSupport Manager supports remote screen control, screen recording, system monitoring, remote system grouping for better control, and plenty of connectivity options, including network traffic encryption.</p> <p>That said, the consequences of such an infection are broad and severe, mainly concerning unauthorized access to sensitive user data and downloading further malware.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/06 New Mac malware families linked to China</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.securityweek.com/many-13-new-mac-malware-families-discovered-2022-linked-china">https://www.securityweek.com/many-13-new-mac-malware-families-discovered-2022-linked-china</a>
GIST	<p>More than a dozen new Mac malware families were discovered in 2022, including information stealers, cryptocurrency miners, loaders, and backdoors, and many of them have been linked to China.</p> <p>Mac security expert Patrick Wardle has compiled a <a href="#">list of the macOS malware</a> that came to light over the course of last year. The number of new malware appears to be increasing as only <a href="#">eight new families</a> were spotted in 2021.</p> <p>The first malware to emerge in 2022 was SysJoker, a cross-platform backdoor used by an APT actor in targeted attacks. SysJoker, observed targeting an educational institution, can download and execute other malicious components.</p> <p>The second macOS malware, <a href="#">DazzleSpy</a>, was used as part of a state-sponsored cyberespionage campaign aimed at pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong. The malware has been described as a backdoor and information stealer, and the main suspect behind these attacks is China.</p> <p>Another new piece of malware, which may be linked to DazzleSpy, has been named VPN Trojan (Covid) and it has been described as a persistent backdoor that can download and execute second stage payloads directly from memory.</p> <p>The malware named oRAT has also been linked to a Chinese APT group. The Go-written threat has a long list of espionage-related capabilities, but the analyzed sample did not have any persistence mechanism.</p> <p>A Chinese cyberespionage group is also believed to be behind a macOS backdoor named <a href="#">Rshell</a>, which has been delivered through a supply chain attack. The malware can execute commands in a shell and steal information.</p> <p>The malware known as Gimmick has also been tied to Chinese cyberspies. The backdoor uses cloud providers for command and control (C&amp;C).</p> <p>China has also been mentioned in a report describing a new attack framework dubbed <a href="#">Alchemist</a>, which targets Windows, Linux and macOS devices. The remote access trojan (RAT) delivered by the attackers, named Insekt, can execute commands and collect information, but the macOS version has not been recovered so its exact capabilities are unknown.</p> <p>CloudMensis has been used to steal valuable information from compromised systems, including documents, screenshots and keystrokes. The malware exploited older vulnerabilities, which suggests it has been around for several years.</p> <p>Three of the new Mac malware families identified in 2022 relied on typosquatting to spread. <a href="#">CrateDepression</a> leveraged the popularity of a Rust crate to spread and it deployed other payloads</p>



	<p>on compromised systems. <a href="#">Pymafka</a> posed as a popular Python package for delivery and installed a Cobalt Strike agent. <a href="#">SentinelSneak</a> was disguised as a SentinelOne SDK and attempted to exfiltrate sensitive data from infected devices.</p> <p>The list of new macOS malware also includes KeySteal, a keychain stealer delivered via trojanized versions of a free app, and the cryptocurrency miner CoinMiner, which uses various open source components and I2P for stealthy communications.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 No extended security updates Windows 7</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/microsoft/windows-7-to-stop-receiving-extended-security-updates-on-tuesday/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/microsoft/windows-7-to-stop-receiving-extended-security-updates-on-tuesday/</a>
GIST	<p>Windows 7 Professional and Enterprise editions will no longer receive extended security updates for critical and important vulnerabilities starting Tuesday, January 10, 2023.</p> <p>Microsoft launched the legacy operating system in October 2009. It then <a href="#">reached its end of support</a> in January 2015 and its <a href="#">extended end of support</a> in January 2020.</p> <p>The Extended Security Update (ESU) program was the last resort option for customers who still needed to run legacy Microsoft products past their end of support on Windows 7 systems.</p> <p>All editions of Windows 8.1, launched nine years ago in November 2013, will also reach EOS on the same day.</p> <p>"Most Windows 7 devices will not meet the hardware requirements for upgrading to Windows 11, as an alternative, compatible Windows 7 PCs can be upgraded to Windows 10 by purchasing and installing a full version of the software," Microsoft <a href="#">explains</a>.</p> <p>"Before investing in a Windows 10 upgrade, please consider that Windows 10 will reach its end of support date on October 14, 2025."</p> <p>Microsoft recommends customers with devices that don't meet the technical requirements for a more recent Windows release to replace them with ones that support Windows 11 to take advantage of the latest hardware capabilities.</p> <p>Currently, Windows 7 runs on over 11% of all Windows systems worldwide, while Windows 8.1 is used by 2.59% of Microsoft customers, according to <a href="#">Statcounter GlobalStats</a>.</p> <p><b>Web browsers also dropping support for Windows 7</b></p> <p>Next week, Redmond will also release Microsoft Edge 109, the web browser's last version to come with support for Windows 7 and Windows 8/8.1.</p> <p>This version of Microsoft Edge will also be the last to support Windows Server 2008 R2, Windows Server 2012, and Windows Server 2012 R2.</p> <p>A similar announcement was made by Google in October when the company said that version 110 of its Google Chrome web browser would also <a href="#">likely drop support for Windows 7 and 8.1</a> starting in February 2023.</p> <p>Microsoft Edge 109 and Google Chrome 110 will continue to work on legacy operating systems, but they will no longer receive security updates and bug fixes, exposing their users to security risks.</p> <p>Google Chrome now has a <a href="#">market share of over 64%</a>, followed by Safari with roughly 18% and Microsoft Edge (which uses Chrome's Blink rendering engine with enhancements from Microsoft) with just over 4%.</p>

	<p>Other vendors have already dropped support for Windows 7 ahead of the date when the OS will stop receiving security updates.</p> <p>For instance, NVIDIA is no longer providing Windows 7 and Windows 8.1 drivers since last year, <a href="#">starting in October 2021</a>.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Group releases stolen UK schools' data</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/vice-society-releases-info-stolen-uk-schools-passport-scans">https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/vice-society-releases-info-stolen-uk-schools-passport-scans</a>
GIST	<p>Another month, another release of personal information stolen from a school system. This time, it's a group of 14 schools in the United Kingdom.</p> <p>Once again, the perpetrator appears to be Vice Society, which is <a href="#">well known</a> for targeting educational systems in the US. As the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) pointed out in a bulletin from <a href="#">Sept. 6</a>, "K-12 institutions may be seen as particularly lucrative targets due to the amount of sensitive student data accessible through school systems or their managed service providers."</p> <p>The <a href="#">UK hack</a> may have turned up even more confidential information than the <a href="#">Los Angeles school system breach</a> last year. As the <a href="#">BBC reported</a> on Jan. 6, "One folder marked 'passports' contains passport scans for pupils and parents on school trips going back to 2011, whereas another marked 'contract' contains contractual offers made to staff alongside teaching documents on muscle contractions."</p> <p>Some prominent school cyberattacks in the US include public school districts in <a href="#">Chicago</a>, <a href="#">Baltimore</a>, and <a href="#">Los Angeles</a>. A new study from digital learning platform Clever claims that <a href="#">one in four schools</a> experienced a cyber-incident over the past year, and according to a <a href="#">new report</a> from security software vendor Emsisoft, at least 45 school districts and 44 higher learning institutions suffered <a href="#">ransomware attacks in 2022</a>.</p> <p>"Schools are an attractive target as they are typically data-rich and resource-poor," Karen Sorady, vice president of member engagement at the Center for Internet Security (CIS), <a href="#">told Michigan Live</a> in November, after a K-12 school district in Jackson, Mich., was hit. "Without proper resources in terms of dedicated staffing and the necessary tools and training to protect against cyber-attacks, schools can be a soft target."</p> <p>Many of the 14 schools hit by this latest leak are colleges and universities, but primary and secondary schools were also hit, according to the BBC's list.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Chick-fil-A investigates reports of breach</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/chick-fil-a-investigates-reports-of-hacked-customer-accounts/?&amp;web_view=true">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/chick-fil-a-investigates-reports-of-hacked-customer-accounts/?&amp;web_view=true</a>
GIST	<p>American fast-food restaurant chain Chick-fil-A is investigating what it described as "suspicious activity" linked to some of its customers' accounts.</p> <p>"We are investigating suspicious activity on some customer accounts," the company said in an alert displayed on its official website on Friday and first spotted by security researcher <a href="#">Dominic Alvieri</a>.</p> <p>"We are committed to protecting customers' data and are working quickly to resolve the issue."</p> <p>A <a href="#">support page</a> on Chick-fil-A's One Membership Program customer support website provides potentially affected clients with details on what to do if they notice unusual activity on their accounts, if they see any mobile orders placed without their approval, or if they're loyalty points were used to redeem or gift rewards fraudulently.</p> <p>In the event that they observe anything unusual, customers are advised to immediately change their passwords to new ones that unique, complex, and not used on other online platforms or accounts.</p>

They should also remove any stored payment methods, such as credit or debit cards, from their Chick-fil-A One accounts by going into the Chick-fil-A app, into the Account menu and clicking "Manage payment methods."

Details on what to do if their Chick-fil-A One accounts were used to place mobile orders without their knowledge are available [here](#).

#### **Hacked Chick-fil-A accounts sold online**

Today's warning comes after BleepingComputer emailed the company before Christmas regarding reports that Chick-fil-A user accounts were being breached in credential-stuffing attacks.

While we are yet to receive a reply, a threat intelligence researcher had told BleepingComputer at the time that the hijacked accounts are used with disposable email addresses to buy food in widespread attacks (a tactic Chick-fil-A customers were warned about today).

Some of the stolen accounts are being sold for \$2 to \$200, depending on the account balance, linked payment method, or Chick-fil-A One points (rewards points) balance.

Social networks have also been flooded with customer reports [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#)] saying their accounts have been hacked and emptied of loyalty points.

Chick-Fil-A has since disabled the creation of new accounts and banned the use of disposable email addresses, requiring threat actors to use legitimate email services for hijacking accounts.

A Chick-fil-A One spokesperson was not immediately available for comment when contacted by BleepingComputer again earlier today.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/06 Air France, KLM customers data breach
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/air-france-and-klm-notify-customers-of-account-hacks/?&amp;web_view=true">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/air-france-and-klm-notify-customers-of-account-hacks/?&amp;web_view=true</a>
GIST	<p>Air France and KLM have informed Flying Blue customers that some of their personal information was exposed after their accounts were breached.</p> <p>Flying Blue is a loyalty program allowing clients of multiple airlines, including Air France, KLM, Transavia, Aircalin, Kenya Airways, and TAROM, to exchange loyalty points for various rewards.</p> <p>"Our security operations teams have detected suspicious behavior by an unauthorized entity in relation to your account. We have immediately implemented corrective action to prevent further exposure of your data," notifications sent to affected customers said.</p> <p>"Our Information Security department is taking actions to prevent any suspicious activity with regard to your account."</p> <p>KLM's official Twitter account confirmed the attack and told one of the impacted customers that "the attack was blocked in time and no miles were charged."</p> <p>"I do however invite you to change your Flying Blue-password via the Flying Blue-website," KLM said.</p> <p>This followed reports across social media networks from customers who have received the breach notifications.</p> <p>The list of potentially compromised data includes their names, email addresses, phone numbers, latest transactions, and Flying Blue information like their earned miles balance.</p>

	<p>The breach alerts added that this incident did not expose customers' credit card or payment information.</p> <p>Affected customers were also warned that their accounts had been locked due to the breach and that they must go to the KLM and Air France websites to change their passwords.</p> <p>KLM and Air France didn't reply to requests for comment when BleepingComputer reached out earlier today.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Texas county EMS ransomware breach</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bankinfosecurity.com/texas-county-ems-agency-says-ransomware-breach-hit-612000-a-20876?&amp;web_view=true">https://www.bankinfosecurity.com/texas-county-ems-agency-says-ransomware-breach-hit-612000-a-20876?&amp;web_view=true</a>
GIST	<p>A municipal ambulance services provider that serves 15 cities in a Texas county has reported to federal regulators a ransomware breach potentially affecting 612,000 individuals, which is equivalent to nearly 30% of the county's 2.1 million population.</p> <p>Metropolitan Area EMS Authority, a Texas government administrative agency that does business as MedStar Mobile Healthcare, reported the hacking incident to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office for Civil Rights on Dec. 19. MedStar, which provides ambulance services in Tarrant County, Texas, <a href="#">reported</a> that on Oct. 20, it experienced "issues" with its network systems.</p> <p>Colman McCarthy, an attorney at law firm Shook, Hardy &amp; Bacon, which represents MedStar, tells Information Security Media Group the breach involved <a href="#">ransomware</a>. MedStar did not pay a ransom but was able to fully restore its systems.</p> <p>"Access to a portion of MedStar's network was affected. All servers were back online within 48 hours," McCarthy says. "Throughout the incident, MedStar continued to provide emergency medical services to the communities it serves."</p> <p>MedStar is still determining the full scope of the incident and intends to offer credit monitoring "as required by law and in line with industry practice."</p> <p><b>Breach Details</b></p> <p>In its breach notification statement, MedStar says an unauthorized third party gained access to a restricted location in MedStar's computer network that contained a number of files, including some containing personal health information.</p> <p>"We have not been able to confirm that those files were actually accessed by the third party, and therefore cannot say that any personal information in those files was accessed," the statement says.</p> <p>The affected files contained information for individuals who received treatment and care from MedStar. For the "large majority" of affected individuals, only nonfinancial billing information was involved, MedStar says.</p> <p>But for a portion of others affected, the potentially compromised information includes full name, birthdate, contact information, information related to medical care provided, and other identifiers, MedStar says.</p> <p>MedStar says that the security measures it has in place enable it to take "prompt action" against attempted intrusions into its network. "Those measures were implemented here and reduced the scope of the third party's activity," MedStar says. In the aftermath of the incident, MedStar will take further steps to secure its systems and data, it adds.</p> <p><b>Other Ambulance Hacks</b></p> <p>MedStar's ransomware breach is one of a number of hacking incidents - including other ransomware attacks - reported by other ambulance services and their vendors in recent months.</p>

Those include an apparent ransomware attack and breach reported to HHS OCR on Sept. 9 by Empress Ambulance Services LLC, a New York-based ambulance company as affecting nearly 319,000 individuals.

Massachusetts-based Comstar LLC, which provides billing, collection and other services to municipal and nonprofit ambulance companies, in May reported a hacking breach affecting nearly 69,000 individuals (see: [Hacks Spotlight PHI Risks for Ambulance Cos., Vendors](#)).

"Ransomware actors target ambulance companies for the exact same reason they target any other type of company: They have money," says Brett Callow, threat analyst at security firm Emsisoft.

"The actors may also consider ambulance companies to be a good target because they provide critical services and need to be back online quickly, which may mean they will be more likely to pay than other companies."

Not enough progress is being made in tackling the threat of ransomware, especially its impacts on the healthcare sector, Callow says. "We know that even slight delays in obtaining medical care can significantly affect outcomes - heart attack and stroke patients are two obvious examples - so these incidents represent a very serious risk to life."

Emergency management services agencies such as MedStar also face unique security, privacy and compliance challenges due to the circumstances in which they provide healthcare, says regulatory attorney Paul Hales of the Hales Law Group.

"They are healthcare 'special forces,' working in the field in emergencies - not in carefully designed, well-equipped hospitals," he says.

"Accordingly, EMS [HIPAA](#) compliance programs including risk analysis, risk management and workforce training demand special attention," he says.

Unfortunately, entities faced with emergency patient care requirements can be tempted to put those data security and [privacy](#) activities on the back burner, Hales says.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Russia hackers targeted nuclear scientists</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-hackers-targeted-us-nuclear-scientists-2023-01-06/?&amp;web_view=true">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-hackers-targeted-us-nuclear-scientists-2023-01-06/?&amp;web_view=true</a>
GIST	<p>LONDON/WASHINGTON, Jan 6 (Reuters) - A Russian hacking team known as Cold River targeted three nuclear research laboratories in the United States this past summer, according to internet records reviewed by Reuters and five cyber security experts.</p> <p>Between August and September, as President Vladimir Putin indicated Russia would be <a href="#">willing to use nuclear weapons</a> to defend its territory, Cold River targeted the Brookhaven (BNL), Argonne (ANL) and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories (LLNL), according to internet records that showed the hackers creating fake login pages for each institution and emailing nuclear scientists in a bid to make them reveal their passwords.</p> <p>Reuters was unable to determine why the labs were targeted or if any attempted intrusion was successful. A BNL spokesperson declined to comment. LLNL did not respond to a request for comment. An ANL spokesperson referred questions to the U.S. Department of Energy, which declined to comment.</p> <p>Cold River has escalated its hacking campaign against Kyiv's allies since the invasion of Ukraine, according to cybersecurity researchers and western government officials. The digital blitz against the U.S. labs occurred as U.N. experts entered Russian-controlled Ukrainian territory to inspect Europe's biggest</p>

atomic power plant and assess the risk of what both sides said could be a devastating radiation disaster amid heavy shelling nearby.

Cold River, which first appeared on the radar of intelligence professionals after targeting Britain's foreign office in 2016, has been involved in dozens of other high-profile hacking incidents in recent years, according to interviews with nine cybersecurity firms. Reuters traced email accounts used in its hacking operations between 2015 and 2020 to an IT worker in the Russian city of Syktyvkar.

"This is one of the most important hacking groups you've never heard of," said Adam Meyers, senior vice president of intelligence at U.S. cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike. "They are involved in directly supporting Kremlin information operations."

Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), the domestic security agency that also conducts espionage campaigns for Moscow, and Russia's embassy in Washington did not respond to emailed requests for comment.

Western officials say the Russian government is a global leader in hacking and uses cyber-espionage to spy on foreign governments and industries to seek a competitive advantage. However, Moscow has consistently denied that it carries out hacking operations.

Reuters showed its findings to five industry experts who confirmed the involvement of Cold River in the attempted nuclear labs hacks, based on shared digital fingerprints that researchers have historically tied to the group.

The U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) declined to comment on Cold River's activities. Britain's Global Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), its NSA equivalent, did not comment. The foreign office declined to comment.

#### 'INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION'

In May, Cold River broke into and [leaked emails belonging to the former head of Britain's MI6 spy service](#). That was just one of several 'hack and leak' operations last year by Russia-linked hackers in which confidential communications were made public in Britain, Poland and Latvia, according to cybersecurity experts and Eastern European security officials.

In another recent espionage operation targeting critics of Moscow, Cold River registered domain names designed to imitate at least three European NGOs investigating war crimes, according to French cybersecurity firm SEKOIA.IO.

The NGO-related hacking attempts occurred just before and after the October 18 launch of a report by a U.N. independent commission of enquiry that found Russian forces were responsible for the "vast majority" of human rights violations in the early weeks of the Ukraine war, which Russia has called a special military operation.

[In a blog post](#), SEKOIA.IO said that, based on its targeting of the NGOs, Cold River was seeking to contribute to "Russian intelligence collection about identified war crime-related evidence and/or international justice procedures." Reuters was unable independently to confirm why Cold River targeted the NGOs.

The Commission for International Justice and Accountability (CIJA), a nonprofit founded by a veteran war crimes investigator, said it had been repeatedly targeted by Russian-backed hackers in the past eight years without success. The other two NGOs, the International Center of Nonviolent Conflict and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, did not respond to requests for comment.

Russia's embassy in Washington did not return a request seeking comment about the attempted hack against CIJA.



Cold River has employed tactics such as tricking people into entering their usernames and passwords on fake websites to gain access to their computer systems, security researchers told Reuters. To do this, Cold River has used a variety of email accounts to register domain names such as "goo-link.online" and "online365-office.com" which at a glance look similar to legitimate services operated by firms like Google and Microsoft, the security researchers said.

#### DEEP TIES TO RUSSIA

Cold River made several missteps in recent years that allowed cybersecurity analysts to pinpoint the exact location and identity of one of its members, providing the clearest indication yet of the group's Russian origin, according to experts from Internet giant Google, British defense contractor BAE, and U.S. intelligence firm Nisos.

Multiple personal email addresses used to set up Cold River missions belong to Andrey Korinets, a 35-year-old IT worker and bodybuilder in Syktyvkar, [about 1,600 km \(1,000 miles\) northeast of Moscow](#). Usage of these accounts left a trail of digital evidence from different hacks back to Korinets' online life, including social media accounts and personal websites.

Billy Leonard, a Security Engineer on Google's Threat Analysis Group who investigates nation state hacking, said Korinets was involved. "Google has tied this individual to the Russian hacking group Cold River and their early operations," he said.

Vincas Ciziunas, a security researcher at Nisos who also connected Korinets' email addresses to Cold River activity, said the IT worker appeared to be a "central figure" in the Syktyvkar hacking community, historically. Ciziunas [discovered a series](#) of Russian language internet forums, including an eZine, where Korinets had discussed hacking, and shared those posts with Reuters.

Korinets confirmed that he owned the relevant email accounts in an interview with Reuters but he denied any knowledge of Cold River. He said his only experience with hacking came years ago when he was fined by a Russian court over a computer crime committed during a business dispute with a former customer.

Reuters was able separately to confirm Korinets' links to Cold River by using data compiled through cybersecurity research platforms Constella Intelligence and DomainTools, which help identify the owners of websites: the data showed that Korinets' email addresses registered numerous websites used in Cold River hacking campaigns between 2015 and 2020.

It is unclear whether Korinets has been involved in hacking operations since 2020. He offered no explanation of why these email addresses were used and did not respond to further phone calls and emailed questions.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>01/06 China halts social media accounts of critics</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/6/china-suspends-social-media-accounts-of-covid-poli/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/6/china-suspends-social-media-accounts-of-covid-poli/</a>
GIST	<p>BEIJING — China has suspended or closed the social media accounts of more than 1,000 critics of the government's policies on the COVID-19 outbreak, as the country moves to roll back harsh anti-virus restrictions.</p> <p>The popular Sina Weibo social media platform said it had addressed 12,854 violations including attacks on experts, scholars and medical workers and issued temporary or permanent bans on 1,120 accounts.</p> <p>The ruling Communist Party had largely relied on the medical community to justify its tough lockdowns, quarantine measures and mass testing, almost all of which it abruptly abandoned last month, leading to a surge in new cases that have stretched medical resources to their limits. The party allows no direct criticism and imposes strict limits on free speech.</p>

The company “will continue to increase the investigation and cleanup of all kinds of illegal content, and create a harmonious and friendly community environment for the majority of users,” Sina Weibo said in a statement dated Thursday.

Criticism has largely focused on heavy-handed enforcement of regulations, including open-ended travel restrictions that saw people confined to their homes for weeks, sometimes sealed inside without adequate food or medical care. Anger was also vented over the requirement that anyone who potentially tested positive or had been in contact with such a person be confined for observation in a field hospital, where overcrowding, poor food and hygiene were commonly cited.

The social and economic costs eventually prompted rare street protests in Beijing and other cities, possibly influencing the party’s decision to swiftly ease the strictest measures.

As part of the latest changes, China will also no longer bring criminal charges against people accused of violating border quarantine regulations, according to a notice issued by five government departments on Saturday.

Individuals currently in custody will be released and seized assets returned, the notice said.

The adjustments “were made after comprehensively considering the harm of the behaviors to the society, and aim to adapt to the new situations of the epidemic prevention and control,” the official China Daily newspaper website said in a report on the notice.

China is now facing a surge in cases and hospitalizations in major cities and is bracing for a further spread into less developed areas with the start of the Lunar New Year travel rush, set to get underway in coming days. While international flights are still reduced, authorities say they expect domestic rail and air journeys will double over the same period last year, bringing overall numbers close to those of the 2019 holiday period before the pandemic hit.

The Transportation Ministry on Friday called on travelers to reduce trips and gatherings, particularly if they involve elderly people, pregnant women, small children and those with underlying conditions.

People using public transport are also urged to wear masks and pay special attention to their health and personal hygiene, Vice Minister Xu Chengguang told reporters at a briefing.

Nonetheless, China is forging ahead with a plan to end mandatory quarantines for people arriving from abroad beginning on Sunday.

Beijing also plans to drop a requirement for students at city schools to have a negative COVID-19 test to enter campus when classes resume Feb. 13 after the holiday break. While schools will be allowed to move classes online in the event of new outbreaks, they must return to in-person instruction as soon as possible, the city education bureau said in a statement Friday.

However, the end to mass testing, a highly limited amount of basic data such as the number of deaths, infections and severe cases, and the potential emergence of new variants have prompted governments elsewhere to institute virus testing requirements for travelers from China.

The World Health Organization has also expressed concern about the lack of data from China, while the U.S. is requiring a negative test result for travelers from China within 48 hours of departure.

Chinese health authorities publish a daily count of new cases, severe cases and deaths, but those numbers include only officially confirmed cases and use a very narrow definition of COVID-related deaths.

Authorities say that since the government ended compulsory testing and permitted people with mild symptoms to test themselves and convalesce at home, it can no longer provide a full picture of the state of the latest outbreak.

On Saturday, the National Health Commission reported 10,681 new domestic cases, bringing the country's total number of confirmed cases to 482,057. Three new deaths were also reported over the previous 24 hours, bringing the total to 5,267.

The numbers are a fraction of those announced by the U.S., which has put its death toll at more than 1 million among some 101 million cases.

But they're also much smaller than the estimates being released by some local governments. Zhejiang, a province on the east coast, said Tuesday it was seeing about 1 million new cases a day.

China has said the testing requirements being imposed by foreign governments - most recently Germany and Sweden - aren't science-based and has threatened unspecified countermeasures. Its spokespeople have said the situation is under control, and reject accusations of a lack of preparation for reopening.

Despite such assertions, the Health Commission on Saturday rolled out regulations for strengthened monitoring of viral mutations, including testing of urban wastewater. The lengthy rules called for increased data gathering from hospitals and local government health departments and stepped-up checks on "pneumonia of unknown causes."

If a variant emerges in an outbreak, it is found through genetic sequencing of the virus.

Since the pandemic started, China has shared 4,144 sequences with GISAID, a global platform for coronavirus data. That's only 0.04% of its reported number of cases - a rate more than 100 times less than the United States and nearly four times less than neighboring Mongolia.

Meanwhile, Hong Kong also plans to reopen some of its border crossings with mainland China on Sunday and allow tens of thousands of people to cross every day without being quarantined.

The semi-autonomous southern Chinese city has been hard-hit by the virus and its land and sea border checkpoints with the mainland have been largely closed for almost three years. Despite the risk, the reopening is expected to provide a much-needed boost to Hong Kong's tourism and retail sectors.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Seattle schools sue tech giants over harm</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Seattle-schools-sue-tech-giants-over-social-media-17702255.php">https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Seattle-schools-sue-tech-giants-over-social-media-17702255.php</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE (AP) — The public school district in Seattle has filed a novel lawsuit against the tech giants behind TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Snapchat, seeking to hold them accountable for the mental health crisis among youth.</p> <p>Seattle Public Schools filed the lawsuit Friday in U.S. District Court. The 91-page complaint says the social media companies have created a public nuisance by targeting their products to children.</p> <p>It blames them for worsening mental health and behavioral disorders including anxiety, depression, disordered eating and cyberbullying; making it more difficult to educate students; and forcing schools to take steps such as hiring additional mental health professionals, developing lesson plans about the effects of social media, and providing additional training to teachers.</p> <p>“Defendants have successfully exploited the vulnerable brains of youth, hooking tens of millions of students across the country into positive feedback loops of excessive use and abuse of Defendants’ social media platforms,” the complaint said. “Worse, the content Defendants curate and direct to youth is too often harmful and exploitive ....”</p> <p>Meta, Google, Snap and TikTok did not immediately respond to requests for comment Saturday.</p>

	<p>While federal law — Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act — helps protect online companies from liability arising from what third-party users post on their platforms, the lawsuit argues that provision does not protect the tech giants' behavior in this case.</p> <p>“Plaintiff is not alleging Defendants are liable for what third-parties have said on Defendants’ platforms but, rather, for Defendants’ own conduct,” the lawsuit said. “Defendants affirmatively recommend and promote harmful content to youth, such as pro-anorexia and eating disorder content.”</p> <p>The lawsuit says that from 2009 to 2019, there was on average a 30% increase in the number of Seattle Public Schools students who reported feeling “so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row” that they stopped doing some typical activities.</p> <p>The school district is asking the court to order the companies to stop creating the public nuisance, to award damages, and to pay for prevention education and treatment for excessive and problematic use of social media.</p> <p>While hundreds of families are pursuing lawsuits against the companies over harms they allege their children have suffered from social media, it's not clear if any other school districts have filed a complaint like Seattle's.</p> <p>Internal studies revealed by Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen in 2021 showed that the company knew that Instagram negatively affected teenagers by harming their body image and making eating disorders and thoughts of suicide worse. She alleged that the platform prioritized profits over safety and hid its own research from investors and the public.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

## Terrorism, Extremism

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	01/09 Germany garages searched in attack plot
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/dortmund-crime-germany-indictments-7ee2b4133da3df428740d12ac1c0e2dc">https://apnews.com/article/dortmund-crime-germany-indictments-7ee2b4133da3df428740d12ac1c0e2dc</a>
GIST	<p>BERLIN (AP) — German investigators on Monday searched two garages used by an Iranian man arrested on suspicion that he could be planning an attack with deadly chemicals.</p> <p>The 32-year-old suspect and his 25-year-old brother were detained on Saturday night in Castrop-Rauxel, in western Germany, following a tip from U.S. security officials. Authorities say the men are suspected of planning a serious attack motivated by Islamic extremism, for which at least one of them had allegedly sought to obtain the potent toxins cyanide and ricin.</p> <p>A court in Dortmund on Sunday evening ordered the pair kept in custody pending a possible indictment, prosecutors in Duesseldorf said in a statement. They are suspected of conspiracy to murder, a charge that can carry a prison sentence of three to 15 years.</p> <p>Prosecutors said on Sunday that an initial search of the elder suspect’s home turned up no toxic substances.</p> <p>On Monday, they said they have discovered that he used two garages in the back yard of a house in Castrop-Rauxel, and they also were being searched with help from analysts trained to deal with possible dangerous substances.</p> <p>It wasn’t yet clear how far advanced the plans for an attack were and whether the suspects had picked a specific target.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	01/08 Manchester arena plotters, drug gang links
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/links-between-10m-cocaine-ecstasy-25903931">https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/links-between-10m-cocaine-ecstasy-25903931</a>
GIST	<p>The links between a multi-million pound drugs gang which flooded the streets with cocaine and ecstasy and the Abedi brothers who plotted the Manchester Arena bombing can be revealed. Five drug dealers were jailed this week for their part in a four year drugs plot which began before Salman Abedi committed the appalling atrocity in May 2017, which claimed the lives of 22 innocent people.</p> <p>Zuhir Nassrat, 24, who was named in court and is wanted by police for his alleged role in the drugs gang, was arrested as part of the investigation into the Arena bombing. He denied any involvement and was later released without charge.</p> <p>Nassrat was linked to IP addresses which had made attempts to purchase hydrogen peroxide, a chemical used in the making of the bomb, the Manchester Arena public inquiry heard. He was interviewed 13 times by police and said he had given his bank card details to Hashem Abedi, the brother of Salman Abedi who is in jail serving a minimum of 55 years in jail for helping his sibling prepare the terrorist attack.</p> <p>Nassrat was set to have been called to the inquiry, but is thought to have left the country. During the public inquiry, other members of the gang were mentioned and were said to be associates of the Manchester born brothers.</p> <p>Ebrahim Sadigh was alleged to have been an 'interface' in the purchase of hydrogen peroxide, the inquiry heard. Sadigh provided a statement to police but later refused to have further dialogue with officers.</p> <p>It was said that images of Nassrat's bank card were sent to Sadigh in March 2017 to pass on to Hashem Abedi. Police also spoke to Illyas Abudaber, another alleged associate of the Abedi brothers.</p> <p>His IP address was also linked to the attempted purchase of hydrogen peroxide, the inquiry heard. Abudaber was not arrested and did not provide a witness statement.</p> <p>The links between this drugs gang and the Arena bomber can be disclosed following a two day sentencing hearing at Manchester Crown Court this week in which Ebrahim Sadigh, Illyas Abudaber, Sadigh's brother Mohammed Sadigh, Hamam Alhamruni and Hamza Azouz, were sentenced in relation to a 'sophisticated' conspiracy which saw an estimated £10 million worth of drugs peddled.</p> <p>Hashem Abedi is the only person to be prosecuted in relation to the terror attack. He was 2,000 miles away in Libya at the time his brother detonated a huge bomb in his backpack in the foyer of the Arena as concert goers left a Ariana Grande show on the evening of May 22, 2017.</p> <p>Abedi's trial at the Old Bailey heard how he had encouraged his sibling and helped him design the devastating bomb, as well as source shrapnel and chemicals to make deadly TATP explosive. The siblings planned the attack for months in advance, and also got unwitting friends to purchase bomb-making chemicals via their Amazon accounts.</p> <p>The drugs case, investigated by GMP's gang-busting Xcalibre taskforce, emerged from the huge investigation into the bombing, given the codename Operation Manteline. It provided a snapshot into the scale of the drugs plot.</p> <p>Brothers Mohammed and Ebrahim Sadigh, 30 and 22, Illyas Abudaber, 23, Hamam Alhamruni 24, and Hamza Azouz, 31, were part of a conspiracy in which cocaine, MDMA, cannabis and ketamine were peddled across the city, before it was eventually brought down in December 2020.</p> <p>The seeds of the gang's downfall came just over a month before the Arena bombing, when police investigating a crash on the Curry Mile made a key discovery.</p>

As well as seizing drugs from a car, officers discovered two phones which would implicate three members of the gang. One of the phones was attributed to Abudaber, a 'runner' within the operation. Another significant breakthrough came during a raid at a flat in Blue Moon Way, Moss Side, where Mohammed Sadigh had lived.

Officers found £12,000 worth of drugs including cocaine, MDMA and cannabis, as well as £7,500 in cash, multiple phones, an iMac and drug paraphernalia.

"A number of items indicative of a lavish lifestyle were also recovered including a designer clothing, a Rolex watch box and a personalised number plate which read 'R900 MOE', and was attributed to Mohammed," prosecutor Neil Fryman said.

Another road traffic incident provided a key breakthrough for police. After a 90mph pursuit which started in Harpurhey and ended in Salford, an Audi was found abandoned, containing small amounts of cocaine, ketamine and MDMA.

But it was the work of a police dog which uncovered the most damning evidence. Dumped in a nearby garden, a Deliveroo bag containing a 'huge' amount of 'wholesale' quantities of drugs, as well as £20,000 was recovered.

Fingerprints were detected including those of Ebrahim Sadigh, Abudaber and Alhamruni. The Sadigh brothers, Azouz, Abudaber and Alhamruni all faced justice this week after confessing to their roles in the gang.

Mohammed Sadigh and Ebrahim Sadigh, both of Quantock Street, Moss Side, were jailed for 11 and seven years respectively after pleading guilty to conspiracy to supply cocaine, MDMA, cannabis and ketamine. Azouz, of Mardy Street, Cardiff, was jailed for six years. He also admitted conspiracy to supply cocaine, MDMA, cannabis and ketamine.

Abudaber, of Birchfields Road, Fallowfield, was jailed for 12 years. He pleaded guilty to conspiracy to supply cocaine, MDMA, cannabis and ketamine, as well as a string of further offences, including possession of a loaded firearm.

Alhamruni, of Nevada Street, Ardwick, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to supply cocaine, cannabis and ketamine, as well as two breaches of a suspended sentence. He was jailed for six years and four months.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/09 Taliban officials: prosecute Prince Harry
SOURCE	<a href="https://von.gov.ng/taliban-officials-call-for-prosecution-of-prince-harry/">https://von.gov.ng/taliban-officials-call-for-prosecution-of-prince-harry/</a>
GIST	<p>A group of Taliban officials in Helmand province, where British forces were based between 2006 and 2014 in Afghanistan, and another group of protesters who gathered in the provincial capital Lashkar Gah have called for the prosecution of the Duke of Sussex, Prince Harry, for revealing that he killed 25 fighters whom he considers as chess pieces rather than persons.</p> <p>This confession made in his highly-anticipated book, Spare, further revealed that this was done during his time in the military, where he had tours in Afghanistan. During one tour between 2012 and 2013, he served as an Apache attack helicopter co-pilot gunner. Harry writes in the book that the killings of the 25 Afghans did not fill him with satisfaction, but he was not ashamed either.</p> <p>Hameedullah Hameedi, a member of the provincial council in Helmand, said: <b><i>"If Harry considered himself a member of a civilised world, this is a shame for him to say that he killed 25 people. And it is an even bigger shame for him to talk about it proudly, like an illiterate person from a poor society with no knowledge and no education."</i></b></p> <p>He used the opportunity to state the demand of the group; <b><i>"We are not only demanding that he be prosecuted in the international court, but also demanding the international community punish him as</i></b></p>



***soon as possible. It will definitely have an impact on British-Afghan relations because people are aware that it is a British officer belonging to the Royal Family – Prince Harry – who martyred 25 Afghans and has committed such crimes.”***

The relative of a victim of a 2011 airstrike said to have been carried out by British forces, Mullah Abdullah, was among those saying Harry should be put on trial. He said he lost nine relatives when an airstrike hit his house at the market in the village of Yakhchal in the Nahr-E-Saraj district.

He spoke from the graveside of his dead father, who was among those killed: ***“We ask the international community to put this person (Prince Harry) on trial, and we should get compensation for our losses. We lost our house, our life, and family members, we lost our livelihood and also our loved ones.”***

Samiullah Sayed, deputy director of education in Helmand, added: ***“As the prince has admitted, he has martyred 25 people. Harry and the others who invaded Afghanistan have committed the same crimes. As an independent nation, we will never ever forget the brutality, savagery and their cruelty that they performed against our country and our people.”***

Various members of the British military have taken exception to the duke going public with the number he killed. Retired Royal Navy officer rear admiral Chris Parry told Sky News that in 35 years of service, including in combat, he had never heard a colleague say what their score was. ***“I’m afraid to say it’s clumsy, tasteless and does not afford respect to the people who have been killed,”*** he stated.

And former senior army officer Colonel Richard Kemp said he thought Harry’s comments were “ill-judged” and could incite an attack on British soldiers.

Sky’s international affairs editor Dominic Waghorn said Harry’s dispassionately describing what he did is a propaganda and recruitment godsend to the country’s enemies, something borne out by the reaction on Taliban and other extremist social media. But retired former senior intelligence officer Philip Ingram said he recognised in Harry the signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and said he needed to be protected rather than criticised further.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>01/06 AQ plans to fake death of dead leader?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.yahoo.com/news/al-qaeda-planning-fake-death-001258348.html">https://www.yahoo.com/news/al-qaeda-planning-fake-death-001258348.html</a>
GIST	<p>Al Qaeda is planning to announce a fake cause of death for former leader Ayman al Zawahiri, who was already <a href="#">killed by a U.S. airstrike</a>, according to senior sources in the jihadi movement.</p> <p>Under the plan, al Qaeda would announce that Zawahiri died from ill-health, even though <a href="#">Joe Biden held a press conference to say that Osama bin Laden’s successor had been taken out by a precision strike</a> on an upmarket district of Kabul six months ago.</p> <p>When the U.S. eliminated bin Laden in 2011 in a night raid on his compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, al Qaeda acknowledged his death within four days and Zawahiri became the new “General Emir of al Qaeda”.</p> <p>Sources close to al Qaeda told The Daily Beast that the Taliban has begged al Qaeda not to confirm or deny <a href="#">Zawahiri’s death</a>. “Hiding the martyrdom of Zawahiri is a result of secret understandings between the Taliban and al Qaeda,” said a senior jihadist in the region.</p> <p>The Taliban, which regained control of Afghanistan in August 2021, has been in total denial. After the strike, spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said they would carry out a full investigation into the July strike but there has still been no official word.</p> <p>The attack was an embarrassment to the Taliban on many levels. The group had agreed to cut ties with al Qaeda during the Doha peace deal with the Trump Administration in 2019, so it was extremely awkward when it turned out the terror group’s leader was living in one of the most luxurious neighborhoods in the</p>

capital city. From the perspective of other jihadis, the U.S. strike also clearly demonstrated that the Taliban was unable to offer protection.

A source close to jihadist elements said evidence has been uncovered that the CIA had even penetrated the property where Zawahiri was hiding, with alleged discoveries of spy cameras and other surveillance devices inside the house—even in Zawahiri's bed. In September, the CIA revealed a very detailed model of the property in their museum in Virginia, which indicates the huge amount of information collected on the house.

Whichever way you see it, the assassination left the Taliban even more isolated. Their first regime was overthrown by the U.S. in 2001 when Washington demanded they hand over Osama Bin Laden after 9/11 but they refused to do so.

Having lost one government due to al Qaeda, they are determined not to be destabilized by their fellow jihadis this time. Sources said the Haqqani Network, a semi-autonomous offshoot within the Taliban organization, has been lobbying al Qaeda to keep quiet.

Al Qaeda have been going along with the plan—releasing supposedly new audio of Zawahiri last month—even though attributing the emir's death to illness rather than the Americans would deny him the honor of martyrdom.

“Zawahiri and Osama wished for martyrdom by infidels, both got their wish, but al Qaeda is hiding it to save the Taliban from disaster and consequences of having a top leadership presence in the Taliban capital,” said a second senior jihadist source, who has met Zawahiri.

A new leader has not yet been identified. Jihadist sources in the region told The Daily Beast that there are three members of al Qaeda in the running to become the new emir of the global organization; Saif al Adel, [a veteran al Qaeda operative who's been wanted by the U.S. since 1998](#), Yasin al-Suri, [reportedly a senior financier for the terror outfit based in Iran](#), and Zawahiri's son-in-law Abdal Rahman al Maghrebi, a Moroccan national who lived in the house where Zawahiri was killed according to sources close to al Qaeda.

It is expected that the new emir will also be based in the Afghan-Pakistani-Iran region rather than the Arabian Peninsula since the Taliban now controls Afghanistan and the Tehreek Taliban Pakistan (TTP) are a growing presence in the tribal Pashtun areas of North-western Pakistan. Many senior Taliban and al Qaeda figures have hidden in the region for two decades despite the heavy American and allied presence.

Another former jihadist close to al Qaeda elements in the region says that the rush for Zawahiri's successor has also been halted because of Taliban influence. “The Taliban told al Qaeda, ‘We once sacrificed our regime for al Qaeda.’ If al Qaeda confirms his death in the Kabul attack, it will embarrass the Taliban, so they are keeping the death and the successor hidden and plan to announce it as a natural death,” he told The Daily Beast. “Al Qaeda wanted to have a public funeral under the Islamic regime of Taliban, but the Taliban would not allow it.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 Woman joined ISIS, seeks re-entry to US</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/islamic-state-group-politics-syria-crime-prisons-dfb3cde1330e15b69a4c18552c837664">https://apnews.com/article/islamic-state-group-politics-syria-crime-prisons-dfb3cde1330e15b69a4c18552c837664</a>
GIST	<p>ROJ CAMP, Syria (AP) — A woman who ran away from home in Alabama at the age of 20, joined the Islamic State group and had a child with one of its fighters says she still hopes to return to the United States, serve prison time if necessary, and advocate against the extremists.</p> <p>In a rare interview from the Roj detention camp in Syria where she is being held by U.S.-allied Kurdish forces, Hoda Muthana said she was brainwashed by online traffickers into joining the group in 2014 and regrets everything except her young son.</p>

“If I need to sit in prison, and do my time, I will do it... I won’t fight against it,” the 28-year-old told U.S.-based outlet The News Movement. “I’m hoping my government looks at me as someone young at the time and naive.”

It’s a line she’s repeated in various media interviews since fleeing from one of the extremist group’s last enclaves in Syria in early 2019.

But four years earlier, at the height of the extremists’ power, she had voiced enthusiastic support for them on social media and in an interview with BuzzFeed News. IS then ruled a self-declared Islamic caliphate stretching across roughly a third of both Syria and Iraq. In tweets from 2015 she called on Americans to join the group and carry out attacks in the U.S., suggesting drive-by shootings or vehicle rammings targeting gatherings for national holidays.

In her interview with TNM, Muthana now says her phone was taken from her and that the tweets were sent by IS supporters.

Muthana was born in New Jersey to Yemeni immigrants and once had a U.S. passport. She was raised in a conservative Muslim household in Hoover, Alabama, just outside Birmingham. In 2014, she told her family she was going on a school trip but flew to Turkey and crossed into Syria instead, funding the travel with tuition checks that she had secretly cashed.

The Obama administration cancelled her citizenship in 2016, saying her father was an accredited Yemeni diplomat at the time she was born — a rare revocation of birthright citizenship. Her lawyers have disputed that move, arguing that the father’s diplomatic accreditation ended before she was born.

The Trump administration maintained that she was not a citizen and barred her from returning, even as it pressed European allies to repatriate their own detained nationals to reduce pressure on the detention camps.

U.S. courts have sided with the government on the question of Muthana’s citizenship, and last January the Supreme Court declined to consider her lawsuit seeking re-entry.

That has left her and her son languishing in a detention camp in northern Syria housing thousands of widows of Islamic State fighters and their children.

Some 65,600 suspected Islamic State members and their families — both Syrians and foreign citizens — are held in camps and prisons in northeastern Syria run by U.S.-allied Kurdish groups, according to a Human Rights Watch report released last month.

Women accused of affiliation with IS and their minor children are largely housed in the al-Hol and Roj camps, under what the rights group described as “life threatening conditions.” The camp inmates include more than 37,400 foreigners, among them Europeans and North Americans.

Human Rights Watch and other monitors have cited dire living conditions in the camps, including inadequate food, water and medical care, as well as the physical and sexual abuse of inmates by guards and fellow detainees.

Kurdish-led authorities and activists have blamed IS sleeper cells for surging violence within the facilities, including the beheading of two Egyptian girls, aged 11 and 13, in al-Hol camp in November. Turkish airstrikes targeting the Kurdish groups launched that month also hit close to al-Hol. Camp officials alleged that the Turkish strikes were targeting security forces guarding the camp.

“None of the foreigners have been brought before a judicial authority ... to determine the necessity and legality of their detention, making their captivity arbitrary and unlawful,” Human Rights Watch wrote. “Detention based solely on family ties amounts to collective punishment, a war crime.”

Calls to repatriate the detainees were largely ignored in the immediate aftermath of IS' bloody reign, which was marked by massacres, beheadings and other atrocities, many of which were broadcast to the world in graphic films circulated on social media.

But with the passage of time, the pace of repatriations has started to pick up. Human Rights Watch said some 3,100 foreigners — mostly women and children — have been sent home over the past year. Most were Iraqis, who comprise the majority of detainees, but citizens were also repatriated to Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Russia and the United Kingdom.

The U.S. has repatriated a total of 39 American nationals. It's unclear how many other Americans remain in the camps.

These days, Muthana portrays herself as a victim of the Islamic State.

Speaking with TNM, she describes how, after arriving in Syria in 2014, she was detained in a guest house reserved for unmarried women and children. "I've never seen that kind of filthiness in my life, like there was 100 women and twice as much kids, running around, too much noise, filthy beds," she said.

The only way to escape was to marry a fighter. She eventually married and remarried three times. Her first two husbands, including the father of her son, were killed in battle.

The extremist group, which is also known as ISIS, no longer controls any territory in Syria or Iraq but continues to carry out sporadic attacks and has supporters in the camps themselves. Muthana says she still has to be careful about what she says because of fear of reprisal.

"Even here, right now, I can't fully say everything I want to say. But once I do leave, I will. I will be an advocate against this," she said. "I wish I can help the victims of ISIS in the West understand that someone like me is not part of it, that I as well am a victim of ISIS."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Taliban project: reconstructing Kabul</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/06/kabul-taliban-reconstruction-development/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/06/kabul-taliban-reconstruction-development/</a>
GIST	<p>KABUL — Taliban authorities have embarked on an ambitious project to change the face of the Afghan capital, a crowded metropolis of 5 million that still displays the scars, monuments and fads of periods of civil conflict, foreign invasion and new-money opulence.</p> <p>The Kabul municipal government, which provides utility services to homes and businesses and then collects fees to support its budget, is setting out to improve selected corners and neglected corridors of the city. It has 180 projects underway, including planting trees on median strips, erecting traffic-circle monuments and building major roads from scratch. The projected total cost is about \$90 million.</p> <p>In the affluent downtown enclave of Sherpur, blast walls have been removed from around showy mansions once occupied by warlords and government officials. Bulldozers have been grading and paving streets that were long closed to the public, shortening commutes and allowing residents to glimpse the abandoned lairs of the mighty.</p> <p>"This is where powerful people lived. I was never allowed here," said a 10-year-old boy who was playing cricket on a newly graded block. A passing Taliban guard chimed in. "These properties were all grabbed illegally. No one paid their taxes," said Fawad Alokozai, 49.</p> <p>In Dasht-i-Barchi, a rundown district across the city dominated by minority ethnic Shiites, municipal crews are smashing old houses to rubble as they prepare to build a connecting road to a major highway. The thoroughfare was originally envisioned 43 years ago by the first Afghan president, Mohammed Daoud Khan, who overthrew the monarchy and designed a master plan for the centuries-old capital that was never fulfilled.</p>

“We have been waiting a long time for this,” said a gray-bearded, 68-year-old resident named Shahrudin, watching dust-covered workers with sledgehammers destroy a row of old mud-brick homes in the future boulevard’s path. He said some residents are worried about being compensated for their properties. “The Taliban are more honest than past governments, so we have to trust they will pay,” he said.

Naimatullah Barakzai, the spokesman for Kabul’s reconstruction initiative, said all international development projects stopped after the Taliban took power last year. “We don’t want to wait for them to start again or depend on foreign aid,” he said. Even though the country of 40 million faces economic hardship, he stressed, “We want to solve our own problems, and we want to make the city beautiful. We don’t want people to think Kabul is ruined now and that we don’t care about culture.”

Barakzai, 40, a longtime municipal official, said his office is using the authority of the new government to get things done, including the seizure of private properties. “No one is allowed to use their influence to refuse us,” he said. “We will pay them, but we will use our tools, and we will implement our plans.”

Unlike Afghan kings and the Soviet-backed modernizers of earlier eras, the Taliban religious militia did not leave a physical stamp on Kabul when it first took power in 1996 after a civil war that left much of the capital in ruins. That five-year reign was infamous for destroying non-Islamic, rural antiquities and landmarks, especially the towering 6th-century Buddha statues carved into cliffs in the northern province of Bamian.

During the past 20 years of elected civilian governments, Kabul underwent a construction boom, which was driven by Western aid and development projects. High-rise apartments created a new skyline, and supermarkets and sleek fashion malls opened. In some areas, streets were paved and storm drains dug. But years of relentless warfare kept foreign investment away, and critics said aid funds often went into contractors’ pockets. Refugees returning from years in Iran and Pakistan swamped poor communities, many already crowded and barely habitable.

One businessman who lives in Sherpur welcomed the new government’s efforts, although he recently lost half his house and nine ancient pine trees when the wreckers came. He said the capital had needed cleaning up in more ways than one.

“In the past, there was corruption and bribes, there were gangs and drugs, but that’s all gone now. If the municipality says they will pay me within the year, I believe it,” said Abid Baloch, 55. “The new government is honest, and it is changing both the physical and political landscape.”

One such change has been the dismantling of an urban fortress once occupied by Abdurrashid Dostum, a former army general, vice president and brutal militia leader now living in Turkey. For years, the structure loomed over a narrow city intersection, slowing traffic to a crawl. Once, police trying to arrest Dostum were unable to get past the blast walls, barbed wire and gun turrets. Now, those defenses are gone and pedestrians stroll in the surrounding lanes.

“This makes me feel like we have done something useful, that all my years of fighting were worth it,” said a Taliban security guard in his 50s named Khairullah, who was sitting next to a snack stand across the street. “We have brought peace, men are growing beards and going to mosques, and citizens are walking freely.”

Militarized structures built by departed U.S. and NATO forces — some overlaid with steel roofs that obscured entire city blocks — have been harder to beautify, especially those now being used by Taliban security agencies. Barakzai said municipal officials have been negotiating with such occupants to remove outer blast walls or hide them from view, so far with little result.

“We have no legal power to force anyone to cooperate or move. We can only file cases in the courts,” Barakzai said. He noted that one relative of a late Afghan president has refused to leave a longtime family

home in downtown Kabul — part of which was due to be demolished — and may remain there indefinitely.

Some of the vacated residential palaces are still off-limits because their former inhabitants have been replaced by Taliban fighters, families and visitors. On July 31, when a U.S. drone strike in Kabul killed Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian-born al-Qaeda leader, he was living as a Taliban guest in a high-walled Sherpur mansion.

Other kinds of public projects are both highly visible and politically symbolic. Along with installing concrete lane dividers on busy boulevards, city workers are razing prominent traffic circle monuments. Several were built to honor slain anti-Taliban leaders such as Ahmed Shah Massoud and Abdul Haq, both killed in 2001. They will be replaced by abstract objects rather than Taliban heroes, though, because the movement's strict Islamic code bans human likenesses.

In poorer areas of the city, the less visible, heavy-duty work of shoring up old roads and building new ones has been moving ahead rapidly. In Dasht-i-Barchi, the new avenue got underway last month with a rumble of heavy equipment. A crowd of residents gathered to watch, sad to see the old houses come down but happy that the community finally would be connected to Highway 1. The major north-south route between Kabul and Kandahar was built by the U.S. Alliance for Progress in the 1960s.

"I don't know why they have to do this now, when winter is coming and people are hungry, but this road is something we need. I can remember my father talking about it when I was a boy," said Mohammed Mohsin, 30, an unemployed butcher. "If it is finally happening with the new government, then we must all be glad."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Border: 12 on terror watchlist nabbed Dec.</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/6/12-terrorism-suspects-nabbed-sneaking-across-south/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/6/12-terrorism-suspects-nabbed-sneaking-across-south/</a>
GIST	<p>Border Patrol agents caught 12 illegal immigrants in November whose names popped on the terrorism watchlist, according to new data revealed this week by the Department of Homeland Security.</p> <p>That's up from nine terrorism suspects nabbed in October and brings the total to 21 through the first two months of the fiscal year.</p> <p>That is well above the pace of last year, which set a record with 98 terrorism suspects nabbed.</p> <p>By contrast, from 2017 to 2020 — roughly matching the years of the Trump administration — Border Patrol agents caught a total of just 11 terrorism suspects at the southern border.</p> <p>The new numbers were revealed just as President Biden prepares to make his first trip to the border as president on Sunday. He is expected to tout his plan to welcome some migrants through a newly created immigration system while embracing Trump-era tools to block others from gaining a foothold in the U.S.</p> <p>Border experts say the rising number of terrorism suspects detected is worrying because it signals more are probably getting through. They say those getting caught either made a mistake or didn't know they were on the watch list.</p> <p>November saw Border Patrol agents make 206,239 arrests of people crossing the southern border illegally — a record for the month.</p> <p>Rep.-elect James Comer, a Kentucky Republican poised to become chairman of the House Oversight and Reform Committee when the new Congress is sworn in, laid blame for the grim statistics at the feet of the Biden administration.</p>



“President Biden’s radical open borders policies have created a national security and humanitarian crisis at the southern border,” he said in a statement to The Washington Times. “Those wishing our country and citizens harm are seeking to exploit chaos at the border and enter the United States undetected.”

The terrorism data is usually part of Customs and Border Protection’s monthly operations update. In this case, most of the November numbers were released the week before Christmas, but the terrorism numbers weren’t updated until Thursday.

The Department of Homeland Security previously considered the numbers too sensitive to release. It reversed that stance and began to publish them after high-profile claims in 2021 by Republicans on Capitol Hill that terrorism suspects were attempting to sneak in amid the border chaos.

The Border Patrol covers the area between official border crossings.

CBP’s Office of Field Operations, which staffs the official ports of entry, reported encountering 15 terrorism suspects at the southern ports of entry in October and November combined. It tallied 69 encounters at northern border crossings.

If those trends continue, both would set yearlong records.

Experts tell The Times that those numbers, while higher than the Border Patrol’s apprehensions, may include more than one entry for the same person — often someone U.S. authorities already have their eye on.

The Border Patrol apprehensions are considered more worrying because they represent people who were trying to sneak in without going through an official border crossing.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/08 TTP chief: open to ceasefire Pakistan govt.
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/still-open-to-ceasefire-agreement-with-pakistan-government-says-ttp-chief/article66352828.ece">https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/still-open-to-ceasefire-agreement-with-pakistan-government-says-ttp-chief/article66352828.ece</a>
GIST	<p>The chief of the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has said that his group is “still open” to a ceasefire agreement with the Pakistan government, according to media reports.</p> <p>In November last year, the <a href="#">TTP called off an indefinite ceasefire agreed with the government in June 2022</a> and ordered its militants to carry out attacks on the security forces.</p> <p>The TTP, which is believed to have close links to al-Qaeda, <a href="#">has threatened to target top leaders</a> of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif’s PML-N and Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari’s PPP if the ruling coalition continued to implement strict measures against the militants.</p> <p>However, the dreaded outfit insisted that it has not scrapped the ceasefire agreement with the government. “We held talks with Pakistan mediated by Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan. We are still open to the ceasefire agreement,” the Dawn newspaper quoted TTP chief Mufti Noor Wali Mehsood as saying in a video on Saturday.</p> <p>Mehsood’s change in stance comes amid reports that he has sought guidance from religious scholars in Pakistan.</p> <p>In the video message, Mehsood said his outfit is “open to guidance” from Pakistan’s religious scholars if they believe “the direction of our jihad” is wrong, according to the <i>Express Tribune</i> newspaper.</p> <p>“If you find any problem in the jihad that we waged [against this global infidel agenda], if you believe we have changed our direction, that we have gone astray, then you’re requested to guide us. We’re always ready to listen to your arguments happily,” the TTP chief said.</p>

Mehsood's comments come amid a sharp uptick in violence across Pakistan.

On Saturday, Pakistan police arrested five TTP terrorists during intelligence-based operations in the country's Punjab province.

Over 5,000 tribesmen took out a rally on Friday in Wana, the headquarters of the South Waziristan tribal district, against the growing unrest, terrorism, and kidnappings in their areas.

The protest comes amidst rising terrorist attacks in the country, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces that are believed to have been carried out by TTP militants.

The TTP, also known as the Pakistan Taliban, was set up as an umbrella group of several militant outfits in 2007.

Its main aim is to impose its strict brand of Islam across Pakistan.

Pakistan had hoped that the Afghan Taliban after coming to power would stop the use of their soil against Pakistan by expelling the TTP operatives but they have apparently refused to do so at the cost of straining ties with Islamabad.

The TTP has been blamed for several deadly attacks across Pakistan, including an attack on army headquarters in 2009, assaults on military bases and the 2008 bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad.

In 2012, Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai was attacked by TTP.

In 2014, the Pakistani Taliban stormed the Army Public School in the northwestern city of Peshawar, killing at least 150 people, including 131 students.

The attack sent shockwaves across the world, and was widely condemned.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/07 Las Vegas MGM solar plant 'terror' attack
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thestreet.com/travel/las-vegas-strip-leader-suffers-terrorist-attack">https://www.thestreet.com/travel/las-vegas-strip-leader-suffers-terrorist-attack</a>
GIST	<p>The Las Vegas Strip has long been one of the most recognizable places in the world. It's a glitzy land of excess filled with giant representations of some of the best-known pieces of architecture in the world.</p> <p>MGM Resorts International (<a href="#">MGM</a>) - has the Luxor, which looks like an Egyptian pyramid, New York, New York's faux Statue of Liberty, and the mock medieval stylings of its Excalibur property. Rival Caesars Entertainment CZR has its Roman-style Caesars palace and its version of the Eiffel Tower at Paris Las Vegas.</p> <p>Add in the hundreds of thousands of tourists who visit Las Vegas each week as well as the massive events like the NFL Draft, NBA All-Star Games, and concerts from the biggest artists in the world and it's easy to see why Las Vegas would be a target for bad actors.</p> <p>That has manifested in a number of unfortunate incidents, the worst of which was the <a href="#">Oct. 1, 2017, event</a> where a gunman opened fire from his hotel room killing 60 people who were attending a concert.</p> <p>Now, a more subtle attack has impacted MGM, in an incident which has been declared a "terrorist" attack by authorities.</p> <p><b>MGM Solar Plant Attacked</b></p> <p>A single man successfully completely disabled the MGM Resorts Mega Array <a href="#">solar</a> power plant in North Las Vegas. The plant serves as the main source of solar power for the company's 13 Las Vegas Strip properties.</p>

"Mohammad Mesmarian, 34, faces terror charges for setting a fire inside one of the plant's transformer pits earlier this week. Police said it could put the facility out of commission for up to two years," [Casino.org](#) reported.

The alleged perpetrator rammed an Idaho-registered Toyota Camry through a gate at the plant after workers had left for the day on Jan. 3. At midnight, according to the [arrest report](#), Mesmarian set fire to the car while "it was parked inside a generator pit after siphoning gas from its tank to burn wires in a transformer. As shown on video surveillance, Mesmarian then watched the flames for about 15 minutes before walking away."

Mesmarian faces charges of committing an act of terrorism, arson, destroying or injuring real or personal property of another, and escape by a felony prisoner.

MGM does not own the solar facility which is run by a company called Invenergy.

### **Las Vegas Is a Target for Violence**

Las Vegas' high profile makes it a target for people looking to commit violent acts. Fremont Street, an area in downtown Las Vegas which has casinos and a sort of non-stop outdoor street party, recently added new security measures.

This has included visitors having to pass through metal detectors, bag checks, and an enhanced police presence. The moves came after an increase in gun-related and other violent crimes in the downtown area.

MGM also recently sold "The Village," the empty piece of land across the street from Luxor and next to the Tropicana, where the Oct. 1, 2017, attack took place. The land was purchased by the Three Affiliated Tribes of North Dakota which is ultimately expected to build a resort/casino on the property (although no plans are imminent).

MGM has already donated two acres of property at the site to Clark County to be used as a memorial.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Somalia govt., al-Shabab deny peace talks</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.voanews.com/a/somali-government-al-shabab-deny-peace-talks/6909112.html">https://www.voanews.com/a/somali-government-al-shabab-deny-peace-talks/6909112.html</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Somali government and the al-Shabab militant group have each denied having peace talks.</p> <p>The denial came Saturday after Abdulfatah Kasim Mohamud, a deputy defense minister and member of the parliament, said the militant group had requested talks with the government.</p> <p>A senior government official later officially denied receiving a request from the militant group.</p> <p>"We have not received any requests from the group," National Security Adviser Hussein Sheikh Ali told Voice of America Somali. "The minister said he was misquoted."</p> <p>Ali said the Somali government's position on al-Shabab has not changed.</p> <p>"Our policy towards talks with Alshabab remains the same," he wrote in a message via WhatsApp.</p> <p>"We aren't negotiating with them as a group. However, individuals who wish to leave the group will undergo a thorough process to defect and be eligible for government amnesty formally," he added.</p> <p>The militant group has also denied the existence of any talks with the Somali government. A website affiliated with al-Shabab said the deputy defense minister's claim that the group requested talks is "baseless."</p>

	<p>"I can confirm that there aren't and can be no talks between us," a militant official told the website. The official was said to be from the group's media department, but his name was not published.</p> <p>The al-Shabab official further ruled out the possibility of talks with Villa Somalia, the seat of Somalia's government.</p> <p>In the past, the group has expressed distrust in opening dialogue with the Somali government.</p> <p>In January 2018, the group's official spokesperson, Ali Mohamud Rage, known as Ali Dhere, said dialogue is "more dangerous than the weapons of mass destruction."</p> <p>"We heard from the infidels and apostates repeatedly stating that they are open to talks with the mujahedeen," he told al-Shabab's radio Andalus. "This is how the infidels use dialogue, as an approach to misguide the Muslims and destroy Muslim causes."</p> <p>He said the aim was to divide (the Mujahedeen) into groups, "so that they can support the group they see as moderates."</p> <p>Saturday, the president of Somalia, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, appointed Abdullahi Mohamed Nor as a senior presidential adviser for preventing and countering violent extremism. Nor had served as the country's Minister of Internal Security until August this year.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 NYC machete suspect indicted on terrorism</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.newsnationnow.com/us-news/northeast/19-year-old-indicted-on-terrorism-charges-in-nyc-machete-attack/">https://www.newsnationnow.com/us-news/northeast/19-year-old-indicted-on-terrorism-charges-in-nyc-machete-attack/</a>
GIST	<p>NEW YORK (<a href="#">PIX11</a>) – Trevor Bickford, the 19-year-old suspect accused of <a href="#">attacking three NYPD officers</a> with a machete near Times Square on New Year's Eve, was indicted on multiple terrorism charges Friday.</p> <p>Bickford was arrested shortly after he allegedly attacked the three police officers at 52nd Street and Eighth Avenue in Manhattan. Bickford hit two officers in the head with a machete before an officer shot him in the shoulder, according to police. Both officers were expected to survive their injuries.</p> <p>Bickford, a resident of Wells, Maine, may have had ties to radical Islamic extremism. Investigators have been reviewing Bickford's online postings, which <a href="#">included some mentions of Islamic extremist views</a>, according to a law enforcement official.</p> <p>The indictment includes the following charges.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attempted Murder in the First Degree (3 counts)</li> <li>• Attempted Murder in the First Degree in Furtherance of an Act of Terrorism (3 counts)</li> <li>• Assault in the First Degree as a Crime of Terrorism (1 count)</li> <li>• Assault in the First Degree (1 count)</li> <li>• Aggravated assault on a Police Officer as a Crime of Terrorism (1 count)</li> <li>• Aggravated assault on a Police Officer (1 count)</li> <li>• Attempted Assault in the First Degree as a Crime of Terrorism (2 counts)</li> <li>• Attempted Assault in the First Degree (2 counts)</li> <li>• Attempted aggravated Assault upon a Police Officer as a Crime of Terrorism (2 counts)</li> <li>• Attempted aggravated Assault upon a Police Officer (2 counts)</li> </ul> <p>"We are grateful for our NYPD officers who put their lives on the line every day to keep us safe, as well as our Joint Terrorism Task Force partners," Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg said in a statement.</p> <p>"All eyes are on Times Square on New Year's Eve and these charges reflect the seriousness of this alleged threat to the safety of our city and our officers."</p>

	Bickford's New York Supreme Court arraignment is scheduled for Feb. 1.
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	01/08 Invictus Games 'serious security issues'?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/prince-harry-invictus-games-taliban-kills-spare-royal-navy-admiral-islamic-state-b1051510.html">https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/prince-harry-invictus-games-taliban-kills-spare-royal-navy-admiral-islamic-state-b1051510.html</a>
GIST	<p>The <a href="#">Duke of Sussex</a> has been accused of making the Invictus Games a target for extremists by revealing he killed 25 people in Afghanistan.</p> <p><a href="#">Admiral</a> Lord <a href="#">West</a>, former head of the <a href="#">Royal Navy</a>, called Harry "very stupid" for giving details of his <a href="#">Taliban</a> kills.</p> <p>The retired admiral told the Sunday Mirror the Invictus Games – which were due to be held in <a href="#">Dusseldorf</a>, <a href="#">Germany</a>, in 2023 – will now have "serious security issues" because of their direct connection to Harry.</p> <p>"The Invictus Games is very much labelled to him and so I would have thought the threat level there will definitely be higher," he told the newspaper.</p> <p>"There will be serious security issues because of what he said. Measures will have to be put in place to protect the veterans.</p> <p>"And there will be people who, given half the chance, will want to do something."</p> <p>The international multi-sport event for wounded, injured and sick servicemen and women, of which the duke is the patron, will now be a prime target for those wanting revenge, Lord West said.</p> <p>"The Taliban will be reading (Harry's claims about killing fighters and) thinking there's this prince calling us all chess pieces and is quite happy about killing us.</p> <p>"And there will be a lot of people, I am sure, in <a href="#">Islamic State</a> and other terrorist organisations, who will think this is something which should be avenged."</p> <p>Harry faced an onslaught of criticism in recent days since the excerpt from his memoir was leaked about the number insurgents he killed as a helicopter pilot.</p> <p>Colonel Tim Collins, known for a pre-battle speech he made in <a href="#">Iraq</a>, was one of many the many distinguished personnel to criticise the Duke's conduct, accusing him of turning against the military – his "other family".</p> <p>Earlier in the week Col Collins called the revelations in the book "a tragic money-making scam".</p> <p>In his controversial memoir, Spare, Harry wrote that flying six missions during his second tour of duty on the front line in 2012 to 2013 resulted in "the taking of human lives", of which he was neither proud nor ashamed.</p> <p>The Daily Telegraph, which obtained a <a href="#">Spanish</a> language copy of the memoir from a bookshop in <a href="#">Spain</a>, earlier reported that Harry said he did not think of those he killed as "people", but instead as "chess pieces" that had been taken off the board.</p> <p>"So, my number is 25. It's not a number that fills me with satisfaction, but nor does it embarrass me," he wrote.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Somalia claims al-Shabab seek negotiations</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/politics-somalia-government-al-shabab-kenya-fe24c90b1f7601ac3241e97904d9f09d">https://apnews.com/article/politics-somalia-government-al-shabab-kenya-fe24c90b1f7601ac3241e97904d9f09d</a>
GIST	<p>MOGADISHU, Somalia (AP) — Somalia’s government claimed Saturday that the al-Shabab extremist group has for the first time asked to open negotiations, amid a military offensive the government has described as “total war.”</p> <p>There was no immediate statement by al-Shabab, an al-Qaida-affiliate that for well over a decade has carried out high-profile bombings in Somalia’s capital and controlled parts of the country’s central and southern regions, complicating efforts to rebuild the once-failed state after decades of conflict.</p> <p>“Al-Shabab requested to open negotiations with the Somali government, but there are two groups within al-Shabab,” Deputy Defense Minister Abdifatah Kasim told journalists in Mogadishu. “The first part is foreigners, and the second part is local Somalis. Those locals have a chance to open up negotiations, but those foreigners who invaded our country have no right for talks. The only option is to return to where they are from.”</p> <p>The deputy defense minister added that “for the Somalis, we are ready to receive them, for they are willing to surrender to the Somali government. They must follow the government’s instructions, reintegrate with their society, or face the Somali National Army in the front lines.”</p> <p>This is the first time Somalia’s federal government has said that the extremist group has requested talks. In September, during a U.S. visit, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud said “they are not willing to negotiate,” while stressing that “we are ready to talk to them” and have sent messages about it.</p> <p>Al-Shabab numbers several thousand fighters, including an unknown number of foreigners, both from regional countries like neighboring Kenya and beyond. The extremists have carried out several high-profile attacks over the years in Kenya, including in the capital, Nairobi, and at a military base used by the U.S.</p> <p>Al-Shabab has long sought to impose strict Islamic law in Somalia and seeks the withdrawal of foreign troops operating in the Horn of Africa country. The United States has a military presence in Somalia to combat the extremists, along with Turkey and a multinational African Union force.</p> <p>Somalia’s president after being elected last year launched a military offensive against al-Shabab with the support of some local militias that have regained control of some communities from the extremists. The president in a New Year’s address vowed to eliminate al-Shabab this year.</p> <p>The extremists, under pressure as the government seeks to squeeze its sources of financing, have lashed out. An <a href="#">October bombing</a> at a busy intersection in Mogadishu killed at least 120 people, and a <a href="#">pair of bombings</a> Wednesday in a region at the heart of the government offensive killed at least 35 people.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Links: Jan 6 rioters to extremist networks</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/new-data-map-illustrates-connections-between-january-6-defendants-and-extremist-groups/">https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/new-data-map-illustrates-connections-between-january-6-defendants-and-extremist-groups/</a>
GIST	<p>START’s Radicalization and Deradicalization team has launched an <a href="#">interactive data tool</a> illustrating connections between Jan. 6, 2021, defendants and their links to extremist networks.</p> <p>The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) is a university-based research, education and training center comprised of an international network of scholars committed to the scientific study of terrorism, responses to terrorism and related phenomena. Led by the University of Maryland, START is a Department of Homeland Security Emeritus Center of Excellence that is supported by multiple federal agencies and departments. START uses state-of-the-art theories, methods and data from the social and behavioral sciences to improve understanding of the origins, dynamics and effects of</p>



	<p>terrorism; the effectiveness and impacts of counterterrorism and countering violent extremism; and other matters of global and national security.</p> <p>As of January 2023, more than 300 defendants who have been criminally charged for participating in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the United States Capitol have been identified as having connections to over 50 contemporary extremist groups and movements, including the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, and the QAnon conspiracy theory, as well as other less populous entities.</p> <p>The January 6th defendants collectively form more than 900 links to these groups and each other. The <a href="#">Capitol insurrection network map</a> displays these relationships, helping users identify the ideologies and networks that played a central role in the attack. START researchers have also created <a href="#">interactive</a> infographics that highlight key characteristics of the defendant population.</p> <p>To be included in the network map, a defendant must have a link to an extremist group or movement that was established prior to Jan. 6, 2021, and that connection must be documented in court records, news articles, or other open sources. A connection between a defendant and a group/movement was made if the individual was a formal member of an extremist group (e.g., Proud Boys and Oath Keepers), self-identified as a member of an extremist movement that does not have a formal membership process (e.g., QAnon and Three Percenters Movement) or publicly praised an extremist group or movement prior to the January 6th attack. Links between defendants were made if there is evidence in open sources that the individuals communicated with each other, in person or online, prior to Jan. 6, 2021.</p> <p>The Capitol insurrection network map only includes individuals who have been charged with criminal offenses in state, local, or federal court for participating in the attack on the Capitol. All defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	<p><i>The Capitol insurrection network map is available <a href="#">here</a>.</i></p> <p><i>Interactive infographics portraying data about the defendant population can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</i></p>

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 Germany: arrest; chemical attack plot</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/dortmund-crime-iran-government-berlin-60f78b43bcb21e6aa8b4e43976ec4cb5">https://apnews.com/article/dortmund-crime-iran-government-berlin-60f78b43bcb21e6aa8b4e43976ec4cb5</a>
GIST	<p>BERLIN (AP) — A 32-year-old Iranian man has been arrested in Germany on suspicion of planning an attack with deadly chemicals, officials said Sunday.</p> <p>Police and prosecutors said the man and another person were detained overnight in the town of Castrop-Rauxel, northwest of Dortmund.</p> <p>In a joint statement they said the man is suspected to have planned a serious attack motivated by Islamic extremism, for which he had allegedly obtained the potent toxins cyanide and ricin.</p> <p>German news agency dpa reported that specialists wearing anti-contamination suits carried evidence out of the man's home.</p> <p>It wasn't immediately clear how far advanced the plans for an attack were and whether the suspect had picked a specific target.</p> <p>But dpa quoted the top security official for North Rhine-Westphalia state, Herbert Reul, as saying authorities had received "a serious tip that led police to intervene the same night."</p> <p>Tabloid newspaper Bild reported that the tip about the alleged plans for a chemical attack came from an allied intelligence agency.</p>

	Five years ago, German police arrested a Tunisian man and his wife on suspicion of planning to carry out a ricin attack in the name of the Islamic State group. <a href="#">They were later found guilty</a> and sentenced to 10 and eight years' imprisonment, respectively.
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

## Suspicious, Unusual

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	01/07 Snow 'no show' as Europe feels winter heat
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/weather-climate-and-environment-droughts-europe-ac556a03360f361496aefb1c3a6569b6">https://apnews.com/article/weather-climate-and-environment-droughts-europe-ac556a03360f361496aefb1c3a6569b6</a>
GIST	<p>RAMSAU, Austria (AP) — Mild weather has left many regions of Europe that would normally be blanketed in snow at this time of year bare, and <a href="#">winter sports resorts are fearing for the future</a>.</p> <p>Many are using snow machines to make artificial pistes, leaving thin white lines snaking through otherwise green and brown landscapes.</p> <p>In the Swiss village of Adelboden, organizers of <a href="#">Saturday's ski World Cup race</a> grappled with above-freezing temperatures to ensure athletes could compete in the popular event while spectators basked in the blazing sunshine.</p> <p><a href="#">Experts say this season's lack of snow offers a glimpse of winters to come</a>, as global temperatures keep rising due to <a href="#">human-caused climate change</a>.</p> <p>The impact is likely to be felt far beyond the regional tourist industry. Winter snow in European mountains such as the Alps is an <a href="#">important natural water store</a> for parts of <a href="#">a continent that's already suffering regular droughts</a> the rest of the year.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	01/06 Great Salt Lake to disappear in 5yrs?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2023/01/06/great-salt-lake-utah-drying-up/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2023/01/06/great-salt-lake-utah-drying-up/</a>
GIST	<p>Without dramatic cuts to water consumption, Utah's Great Salt Lake is on track to disappear within five years, a dire new report warns, imperiling ecosystems and exposing millions of people to toxic dust from the drying lake bed.</p> <p>The report, led by researchers at Brigham Young University and published this week, found that unsustainable water use has shrunk the lake to just 37 percent of its former volume. The West's <a href="#">ongoing megadrought</a> — a crisis made worse by <a href="#">climate change</a> — has accelerated its decline to rates far faster than scientists had predicted.</p> <p>But current conservation measures are critically insufficient to replace the roughly 40 billion gallons of water the lake has lost annually since 2020, the scientists said.</p> <p>The report calls on Utah and nearby states to curb water consumption by a third to a half, allowing 2.5 million acre feet of water to flow from streams and rivers directly into the lake for the next couple of years. Otherwise, it said, the Great Salt Lake is headed for irreversible collapse.</p> <p>“This is a crisis,” said Brigham Young University ecologist Ben Abbott, a lead author of the report. “The ecosystem is on life support, [and] we need to have this emergency intervention to make sure it doesn't disappear.”</p> <p><b>‘An unquestionable health hazard’</b></p>

Scientists and officials have long recognized that water in the Great Salt Lake watershed is overallocated — more water has been guaranteed to people and businesses than falls as rain and snow each year.

Agriculture accounts for more than 70 percent of the state's water use — much of it going to grow [hay and alfalfa](#) to feed livestock. Another 9 percent is taken up by mineral extraction. Cities use another 9 percent to run power plants and irrigate lawns.

There are so many claims on the state's rivers and streams that, by the time they reach the Great Salt Lake, there's very little water left.

Over the last three years, the report says, the lake has received less than a third of its normal stream flow because so much water has been diverted for other purposes. In 2022, its surface sank to a [record low](#), 10 feet below what is considered a minimum healthy level.

With less freshwater flowing in, the lake has grown so salty that it's becoming toxic even to the native brine shrimp and flies that evolved to live there, Abbott said. This in turn endangers the 10 million birds that rely on the lake for a rest stop as they migrate across the continent each year.

The vanishing lake may short-circuit the [weather system](#) that cycles rain and snow from the lake to the mountains and back again, depriving Utah's storied ski slopes. It [threatens](#) a billion-dollar industry extracting magnesium, lithium and other critical minerals from the brine.

It has also exposed more than 800 square miles of sediments laced with arsenic, mercury and other dangerous substances, which can be picked up by wind and blown into the lungs of some 2.5 million people living near the lakeshore.

"Nanoparticles of dust have potential to cause just as much harm if they come from dry lake bed as from a tailpipe or a smokestack," said Brian Moench, president of Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment. He called the shrinking of the lake a "bona fide, documented, unquestionable health hazard."

Dried-up saline lakes are hot spots for dangerous air pollution. Nearly a century after Owens Lake in southern California was drained to provide water to Los Angeles County in the 1920s, it was still the largest source of hazardous dust in the country, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. The pollution has been [linked to](#) high rates of asthma, heart and lung disease and early deaths.

Kevin Perry, an atmospheric scientist at the University of Utah who studies pollution from the [receding lake](#), said about 90 percent of the lake bed is protected by a thin crust of salt that keeps dust from escaping. But the longer the lake remains dry, the more that crust will erode, exposing more dangerous sediments to the air.

"You see this wall of dust coming off the lake, and it reduces horizontal visibility sometimes to less than a mile," Perry said. The impact might only last a couple hours at a time, he said, but the consequences can be profound.

Perry and other researchers have mapped the location and elevation of the dust hot spots, he said, and the results show that the problem is unlikely to abate anytime soon. The lake would need to rise roughly 14 feet to cover 80 percent of current hot spots, Perry said, or about 10 feet to submerge half of them.

### **Running out of time**

Even researchers have been taken aback by the rapid pace of the Great Salt Lake's decline, Abbott said. Most scientific models projected that the shrinking would slow as the lake became smaller and saltier, since saltwater evaporates less readily than freshwater.

But human-caused climate change, driven mostly by burning fossil fuels, has increased average temperatures in northern Utah by about 4 degrees Fahrenheit since the early 1900s and made the region

more prone to drought, the report said. Studies [suggest](#) this warming accounts for about 9 percent of the decline in streamflows into the lake. [Satellite surveys](#) also show significant declines in groundwater beneath the lake, as ongoing drought depletes the region's aquifers.

If humans weren't using so much water, the lake might be able to withstand these shifts in climate, Abbott said. But the combined pressure of drought and overconsumption is proving to be more than it can bear.

Candice Hasenyager, the director of the Utah Division of Water Resources, said Utahns are becoming increasingly aware of the urgency of the lake's decline. Last year, the Utah legislature passed numerous bills aimed at conservation, including a \$40 million trust intended to help the ailing lake. Gov. Spencer Cox (R) recently proposed another massive infusion of funding for water management and conservation.

"We don't have the luxury to have one solution," but curbing water demand is essential, Hasenyager said. "We live in a desert, in one of the driest states in the nation, and we need to reduce the amount of water we use."

Yet recent efforts haven't kept up with the accelerating crisis. Abbott and his colleagues found that Utah's new conservation laws increased stream flow to Great Salt Lake by less than 100,000 acre feet in 2022 — a tiny fraction of the 2.5 million acre feet increase that's needed to bring the lake back to a healthy minimum level.

"Among legislators and decision-makers there is still a very prevalent narrative of 'let's put in place conservation measures so over the next couple of decades the Great Salt Lake can recover,'" Abbott said. "But we don't have that time."

"This isn't business as usual," he added. "This is an emergency rescue plan."

The new report, drafted by more than 30 scientists from 11 universities, advocacy groups and other research institutions, recommends that Cox authorize emergency releases from Utah's reservoirs to get the lake up to a safe level over the next two years.

This would require as much as a 50 percent cut in the amount of water the state uses each year, requiring investment from federal agencies on down to local governments, church leaders and community groups.

### **A shift in thinking**

For decades, Abbott said, officials have prioritized human uses for all the water that trickles through the Great Salt Lake watershed.

Until last year, the lake itself wasn't even considered a legitimate recipient of any water that fell in the region. If a farmer chose not to use some of their shares, allowing that water to flow to the lake and the surrounding ecosystem, they risked losing their water rights in the future.

"We have to shift from thinking of nature as a commodity, as a natural resource, to what we've learned over the last 50 years in ecology, and what Indigenous cultures have always known," Abbott said.

"Humans depend on the environment. ... We have to think about, 'What does the lake need to be healthy?' and manage our water use with what remains."

The weather this year has given Utah a prime opportunity to, in Abbott's words, "put the lake first." After a series of December storms, the state's snowpack is already at [170 percent](#) of normal January levels. If that snow persists and precipitation continues through the rest of the winter, it would enable the state to set aside millions of acre feet of water for the lake without making such drastic cuts to consumption.

"I'm generally optimistic," said Hasenyager, the water resources director. "I don't think we are past a point of no return — yet."

HEADLINE	01/07 'Tranq dope': fresh horror to drug zones
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/07/health/fentanyl-xylazine-drug.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/07/health/fentanyl-xylazine-drug.html</a>
GIST	<p>PHILADELPHIA — Over a matter of weeks, Tracey McCann watched in horror as the bruises she was accustomed to getting from injecting fentanyl began hardening into an armor of crusty, blackened tissue. Something must have gotten into the supply.</p> <p>Switching corner dealers didn't help. People were saying that everyone's dope was being cut with something that was causing gruesome, painful wounds.</p> <p>"I'd wake up in the morning crying because my arms were dying," Ms. McCann, 39, said.</p> <p>In her shattered Philadelphia neighborhood, and <a href="#">increasingly</a> in <a href="#">drug hot zones</a> around the country, an animal tranquilizer called xylazine — known by street names like "tranq," "tranq dope" and "zombie drug" — is being used to bulk up illicit fentanyl, making its impact even more devastating.</p> <p>Xylazine causes wounds that erupt with a scaly dead tissue called eschar; untreated, they can lead to amputation. It induces a blackout stupor for hours, rendering users vulnerable to rape and robbery. When people come to, the high from the fentanyl has long since faded and they immediately crave more. Because <a href="#">xylazine is a sedative</a> and not an opioid, it resists standard opioid overdose reversal treatments.</p> <p>More than 90 percent of Philadelphia's lab-tested dope samples were positive for xylazine, according to <a href="#">the most recent data</a>.</p> <p>"It's too late for Philly," said Shawn Westfahl, an outreach worker with <a href="#">Prevention Point Philadelphia</a>, a 30-year-old health services center in Kensington, the neighborhood at the epicenter of the city's drug trade. "Philly's supply is saturated. If other places around the country have a choice to avoid it, they need to hear our story."</p> <p><a href="#">A study published in June</a> detected xylazine in the drug supply in 36 states and the District of Columbia. In New York City, xylazine has been found in 25 percent of drug samples, though health officials say the actual saturation is certainly greater. In November, the Food and Drug Administration issued a <a href="#">nationwide four-page xylazine alert</a> to clinicians.</p> <p>In December, the Office of National Drug Control Policy said it was <a href="#">tracking the spread closely</a>, and the journal <a href="#">Pediatrics published an analysis of three cases</a> of xylazine ingestion by toddlers.</p> <p>But <a href="#">xylazine's true prevalence</a> is unknown. Hospitals don't test for it. Some state medical examiners don't routinely do so, either.</p> <p>The drug exists in a legal gray zone. Approved 50 years ago by the F.D.A. as a veterinarian-prescribed analgesic, it is not listed as a controlled substance for animals or humans and so is not subject to strict monitoring. Thus, it has not been on the radar of <a href="#">federal law enforcement</a> for diversion or abuse.</p> <p>As with many trapped by tranq, Ms. McCann's hellish descent began with prescription opioids. In 2009, when she was 27, she developed a dependence on painkillers prescribed after a severe car crash. A boyfriend she met at one of her six stays in rehab introduced her to heroin. Cheaper and more potent fentanyl elbowed heroin off the streets. Then, as the Covid-19 pandemic descended in 2020, tranq stormed Philadelphia.</p> <p>Last July, she was evicted from her room in Kensington. "I was sleeping on the sidewalks crying every night, knowing that I was better than that," Ms. McCann said. Someone next to her got shot. A man tried to rape her, but she defended herself with a box cutter. On the hot summer streets, she saw people whose tranq wounds were covered with fleas and maggots.</p> <p>Even so, she said, "I could not pull myself away from that drug."</p>

### **‘Self-destruction at its finest’**

On a recent chilly afternoon, hundreds of people filled the streets surrounding Prevention Point, carrying used syringes to exchange for sterile ones. Some then made their way to the center’s wound care clinic, which has seen a 313 percent rise in visits over the past three years, largely because of tranq.

[Brooke Peder](#), a 38-year-old tattoo artist nicknamed the Hood Grandma, rolled her wheelchair to the exchange check-in and handed over a gallon container filled with syringes. Her mother, sister and wife died of overdoses. Just over a year ago, her right leg had to be amputated because of an infection from a tranq wound that bore into the bone.

Ms. Peder, who has been using drugs in Kensington for 13 years, said she was eager to warn about tranq, especially to newbies arriving in the neighborhood, lured by its decades-old reputation as a drug marketplace. They come from all over the country. Many arrive with money and pay locals to seek out drugs, until they turn into locals themselves, she said.

She unrolled a bandage from elbow to palm. Beneath patches of blackened tissue, exposed white tendons and pus, the sheared flesh was hot and red. To stave off xylazine’s excruciating withdrawal, she said, she injects tranq dope several times a day. Fearful that injecting in a fresh site could create a new wound, she reluctantly shoots into her festering forearm.

“The tranq dope literally eats your flesh,” she said. “It’s self-destruction at its finest.”

Tranq dope is an ever-fluctuating blend of xylazine, a sedative, and usually an opioid, with each type of drug binding to different brain receptors. While there is ample research on opioids, there is almost none on xylazine in humans. Though [it has been detected](#) in [fatal overdoses](#) where opioids were present, its direct correlation with fatality is undetermined.

Xylazine was developed in 1962 as an anesthetic for veterinary procedures. Trials in humans were shut down because the drug led to respiratory depression and low blood pressure. Its use as an addictive substitute for heroin most likely started in the 2000s: In 2011, [a study observed](#) that people in farming areas of Puerto Rico were injecting “anesthesia de caballo” (horse anesthesia) and developing severe skin ulcers.

In Kensington, which has a [substantial Puerto Rican population](#), the drug was found in 2006. But it wasn’t until about 2018 that tranq use began [escalating there](#) and then throughout [the Northeast](#).

Some [epidemiologists](#) theorize that during the pandemic, bottles of domestic xylazine, purchased online with a veterinary prescription or diverted from veterinary supply chains, became popular as a cheap, easy opioid filler.

Unsuspecting Kensington customers saw an advantage to the new mix: A bag of heroin ran about \$10, tranq dope \$5.

But costs accrued. Kim Barauskas, 53, wondered why, after shooting up, she was falling over, waking up later and then immediately feeling that “we’re all sick again and need to get another shot.”

“Most people tell me, ‘I wish I could find dope that didn’t have xylazine,’” said [Dr. Joseph D’Orazio](#), an expert in toxicology and addiction medicine at Temple University Hospital in Philadelphia, which treats dozens of xylazine users daily. “But what gets put out there on the street is what people have to use.”

Reversing an overdose where xylazine was involved is tricky. A dose of the overdose-halting medicine naloxone, which blocks or reverses opioids’ effect on brain receptors, will address the fentanyl but still won’t rouse a victim sedated with xylazine. Desperate rescuers may try a second or third dose. But [too much naloxone](#) can put someone into withdrawal, vomiting and writhing.



Responders are advised to check whether the person is breathing, protect the head and airways, apply one dose of naloxone and call for backup.

Even when opioid withdrawal is contained, the harsh xylazine withdrawal continues. People keep using tranq dope for fear of “getting sick”: migraines, double vision, nausea, numbness in fingers and toes, sweats and body-rattling anxiety. There is no medical protocol yet for managing it; Dr. D’Orazio [typically uses anti-anxiety drugs](#) to treat the patient’s symptoms.

Doctors are perplexed by how xylazine causes wounds so extreme that they initially resemble chemical burns. They may not even appear at injection sites, but often on shins and forearms.

Ms. McCann’s tranq-scorched forearms reeked, oozed, itched and seared. Washing them regularly was nearly impossible, with public restrooms her only source of clean water.

She finally made her way to Prevention Point’s wound care clinic, where [nurses debrided sores](#), dispensed antibiotic ointment and supplies and taught her how to change bandages. Using toenail clippers and alcohol wipes, she meticulously trimmed the eschar.

One day in August, she caught a glimpse of herself: Normally weighing 150 pounds, she was down to 90. “I thought, I either need to do a lethal shot of xylazine or get the hell out of Kensington,” she said.

The only person who would let her use a cellphone was a guy whose arm and leg had been amputated because of his tranq wounds. He was still injecting into his leg stump.

She made her decision.

Now in her fifth month of sobriety at an intensive outpatient program near St. Louis and at a healthy weight, Ms. McCann is both stunned by and proud of her progress. From wrist to elbow, her meandering pink and purple scars are a road map of being lost and found. “People out here might think my arms look really ugly, but they aren’t familiar with tranq wounds yet,” she said. “To me, my arms look really beautiful now.”

### **A revival**

One afternoon, Mr. Westfahl, who coordinates Prevention Point’s overdose prevention team, walked along Kensington Avenue, handing out free nasal spray doses of Narcan, the opioid overdose reversal medication. He and another outreach worker visited encampments of people on the street, some shooting up tranq dope openly, as local residents and shop workers scurried by in the accumulating darkness. People slumped against parking meters and in doorways, heads lolling, necks twisting. Three huddled around a small bonfire, burning a blanket for fuel.

Within 45 minutes, the two men had given away more than 100 doses of Narcan. They hung blue opioid reversal kits on street poles for anyone to grab, filled with disposable gloves, Narcan and plastic mouth guards for mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

Already overwhelmed by fentanyl, social welfare organizations, public health officials and clinics are in the early throes of figuring out how to withstand tranq. At least one state, Florida, has listed xylazine as a controlled substance. A comparable federal scheduling would prompt much stricter monitoring of prescriptions and suppliers of the drug, including in online transactions.

An official with the Drug Enforcement Administration who declined to be named said that the agency had been in contact with the F.D.A. and looks forward “to the completion of its scientific and medical evaluation and scheduling recommendation.”

Some public health experts, noting that tighter controls on diverted prescription painkillers contributed to the rise of illicit fentanyl, questioned whether scheduling xylazine would alleviate its attendant problems, especially if more support programs are not forthcoming.

For now, the practical goal is to [minimize xylazine's damage](#) by educating those who could be exposed, urging them not to use alone. Many leaders in the so-called harm reduction movement are pressing for [supervised injection sites](#), where people can use in safer conditions and even have their drugs [tested](#). Only two exist in the United States, both in [New York City](#), where in 10 minutes [people can learn](#) whether their drugs include xylazine.

The Philadelphia health department has also been [reaching out to clinicians](#) who work with tranq patients, and Dr. D'Orazio has been lecturing widely about how to manage cases.

But a longstanding obstacle to progress is shame. People who use drugs often feel too mortified by their wounds to come in from the shadows to get help at emergency rooms.

That shame can be perpetuated by health care workers, who may dismiss these patients' agonizing withdrawal as mere drug-seeking behavior. "Stigma is so deeply entrenched within [hospital culture](#)," said Sara Wallace-Keeshen, a Prevention Point nurse who wears casual clothes rather than medical scrubs, hoping to appear nonjudgmental and welcoming.

Mr. Westfahl continued his journey down Kensington Avenue. Suddenly, at the intersection of Kensington and Allegheny, shouts went up from a gathering crowd: "Get the Narcan!"

A man was splayed out on the sidewalk, unconscious.

Announcing that he had first-aid training, Mr. Westfahl asked people to hold off on Narcan. He pulled on disposable gloves, checked the man's pulse and opened his mouth to make sure it was free of food, syringe caps — anything he could choke on. Mr. Westfahl tilted the head back to check breathing and keep the airway open. Then, making a fist, he rolled his knuckles briskly up and down the man's chest in a sternum rub; the surprising pain can jolt someone awake. The man began to come to, stupefied.

Mr. Westfahl and some onlookers hoisted him gently. Still heavily sedated, he lurched in the freezing wind, pants drooping. On either side, two women slipped their hands inside his open, flapping jacket.

They were fumbling for his zipper, which they secured to keep him warm. Then, arms around him, holding him up, the three headed back down Kensington Avenue.

[Return to Top](#)

## Crime, Criminals

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	01/06 Judge halts extradition El Chapo son to US
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/06/americas/el-chapo-son-arrest-mexico-prison-intl/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/06/americas/el-chapo-son-arrest-mexico-prison-intl/index.html</a>
GIST	<p>A Mexico City federal judge halted the extradition of Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzmán's son, alleged drug cartel leader Ovidio Guzmán, to the United States on Friday, a day after he was arrested in an intense operation in northern Mexico that led to the deaths of 29 people.</p> <p>The US is seeking Guzmán's extradition for drug trafficking and has offered up to \$5 million for information leading to the capture of the man they say is "a senior member of the Sinaloa Cartel."</p> <p>On Thursday, Mexico's Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard confirmed that there is an arrest warrant in the US dated September 19, 2019, but said the possible extradition of Guzmán would not be immediate due to the formalities of the law. He also stated that Guzmán has ongoing legal proceedings in Mexico.</p> <p>According to the Televisa network and other Mexican media, another federal judge later ordered Guzmán to stay in 60 days of preventive detention for the purpose of extradition after a hearing at the Altiplano maximum security federal prison where he is being held.</p>

CNN has requested a response from Guzmán's defense but has not yet heard back.

Guzmán's father, "El Chapo," had escaped from Altiplano prison on July 11, 2015 [through a](#) mile-long tunnel that featured a motorcycle on tracks. He was later captured and convicted in the US four years later of 10 counts, including engaging in a continuing criminal enterprise, drug trafficking and firearms charges. He was sentenced to life in prison plus 30 years and ordered to pay \$12.6 billion in forfeiture.

Ovidio Guzmán was previously arrested by federal authorities in October 2019, but was released on the orders of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador to avoid further bloodshed.

His latest arrest comes days before US President Joe Biden and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau visit Mexico City to attend the North American Leaders Summit.

Capturing Guzmán could be a way for López Obrador to show the US that he is "in control of the armed forces and Mexico's security situation," Gladys McCormick, a associate professor at Syracuse University who focuses on Mexico-US relations, told CNN in an email.

"It also defuses the power behind any ask from the Biden administration to stem the tide of fentanyl and other narcotics across the border," she added.

At a news conference Friday, López Obrador denied that Guzmán's arrest was linked to Biden's arrival, saying Mexican authorities had acted autonomously.

"About interpretations, there are a lot of them, we do not share them, we acted with autonomy," the Mexican President said.

### **Violent aftermath**

After Guzmán's arrest in Culiacán on Thursday, chaos erupted in the city. The authorities asked citizens to seek refuge due to clashes in several areas.

His arrest was the result of a lengthy operation which involved 200 special forces, Defense Minister Luis Cresencio Sandoval said Friday. Local officials urged citizens to shelter at home amid clashes with cartel members in various parts of the city.

At least 19 suspected gang members and 10 military personnel died during violent clashes in the northern Mexican state of Sinaloa, after authorities arrested Guzmán, along with 21 others. No civilian deaths or injuries were reported.

Security at Altiplano prison has been increased since Guzmán was detained, the minister added.

The President said later on Friday that the city was calmer and officials were working to clear the roads.

"In Culiacán, we opened all the blocked roads and we are working on removing the vehicles that are alongside the streets," López Obrador said.

The state of Sinaloa, where Culiacán is located, is home to one of the world's most powerful narcotics trafficking organizations, the Sinaloa Cartel, of which "El Chapo" was the leader.

The US State Department wrote that law enforcement investigations indicated that Guzmán and his brother, Joaquín Guzmán-López, "inherited a great deal of the narcotics proceeds" following the death of another brother, Edgar Guzmán-López.

They "began investing large amounts of the cash into the purchasing of marijuana in Mexico and cocaine in Colombia. They also began purchasing large amounts of ephedrine from Argentina and arranged for the

	smuggling of the product into Mexico as they began to experiment with methamphetamine production,” the State Department said.
	The brothers are also alleged to oversee an estimated 11 “methamphetamine labs in the state of Sinaloa,” the State Department says.
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Retail exec: cried too much on retail theft</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/06/business/walgreens-shoplifting-retail/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/06/business/walgreens-shoplifting-retail/index.html</a>
GIST	<p>Throughout the pandemic, major retailers have warned about surging theft and a rise in brazen shoplifting attempts. But a top Walgreens executive now says the freakout may have been overblown.</p> <p>“Maybe we cried too much last year” about merchandise losses, Walgreens finance chief James Kehoe acknowledged Thursday on an earnings call. The company’s rate of shrink — merchandise losses due to theft, fraud, damages, mis-scanned items and other errors — fell from 3.5% of total sales last year to around 2.5% during its latest quarter.</p> <p>Kehoe’s message is a notable shift from comments about theft from Walgreens and other retailers like Walmart and Target over the last nearly three years.</p> <p>Companies and retail industry groups have tried to draw attention to shoplifting and “organized retail crime” rings smashing windows and grabbing aisles full of merchandise off shelves, urging lawmakers to crack down. Incidents have certainly happened: Many political leaders and local and national news outlets, including CNN, have picked up on viral incidents of smash-and-grab robberies.</p> <p>So retailers took action. Some began <a href="#">locking up more products like deodorant and toothpaste</a>, adding extra security guards and even shuttering stores.</p> <p>Last January, Walgreens (<a href="#">WBA</a>) said its shrink was up by more 50% from the year prior. The company blamed part of that spike on organized retail crime and closed five locations in the San Francisco area in 2021, claiming theft as the reason for their closure.</p> <p>“This is not petty theft,” Kehoe said last January. “These are gangs that actually go in and empty our stores of beauty products. And it’s a real issue.”</p> <p>But a year later, Kehoe said Thursday that the company added too much extra security in stores.</p> <p>“Probably we put in too much, and we might step back a little bit from that,” he said of security staffing. The company has found private security guards to be “largely ineffective” in deterring theft, so instead it’s putting in more police and law enforcement officers.</p> <p><b>The numbers used didn’t add up</b></p> <p>Though Walgreens may have overblown the shoplifting threat over the last few years, it’s true that theft has always been a problem for retailers — and that it often spikes during recessions and other periods of economic hardship, when people are desperate and may feel the need to turn to petty crime to sustain themselves. What’s more, recent factors like shortstaffed stores and self-checkout can make it <a href="#">easier for thieves to steal</a>.</p> <p>The National Retail Federation estimated that shrink cost retailers \$94.5 billion in 2021, up from \$61.7 billion in 2019 before the pandemic. Shoplifting often does not go reported to the police, but companies have said theft has worsened during the Covid crisis.</p> <p>“Along with other retailers, we’ve seen a significant increase in theft and organized retail crime across our business,” Target (<a href="#">TGT</a>) CEO Brian Cornell said in November.</p>

	<p>Walmart (<a href="#">WMT</a>) CEO Doug McMillon said <a href="#">last month</a> on CNBC that “theft is an issue” and “higher than what it has historically been.” He warned stores could close if it continued.</p> <p>However, it’s not clear the numbers add up.</p> <p>For example, data released by the San Francisco Police Department does not support the explanation Walgreens gave that it was closing five stores because of organized retail theft, the San Francisco Chronicle <a href="#">reported</a> in 2021.</p> <p>One of the shuttered stores that closed had only seven reported shoplifting incidents in 2021 and a total of 23 since 2018, according to the newspaper. Overall, the five stores that closed had fewer than two recorded shoplifting incidents a month on average since 2018.</p> <p>Similarly, a 2021 <a href="#">Los Angeles Times analysis</a> of figures released by industry groups on losses due to organized retail crime found “there is reason to doubt the problem is anywhere near as large or widespread as they say.”</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 Michigan sheriff: 4 dead in home</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/michigan-sheriff-man-shot-family-before-killing-himself/">https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/michigan-sheriff-man-shot-family-before-killing-himself/</a>
GIST	<p>PULLMAN, Mich. (AP) — Investigators for a Michigan sheriff’s office believe a man shot and killed his two children and their mother before killing himself, authorities said late Saturday.</p> <p>In a statement, the Allegan County Sheriff’s Office said officers found all four dead inside a home in Lee Township on Saturday afternoon.</p> <p>An uncle of the woman called police after he went to check on the family and reported seeing her unresponsive through a window, the statement said.</p> <p>The sheriff’s office identified the victims as 35-year-old Cindy Clouse and two children, age 10 and 13. The statement said police believe 34-year-old Roger Kyle Hagger shot Clouse and their children before killing himself but did not provide more detail on the continuing investigation.</p> <p>A neighbor told WOOD-TV that he heard several gunshots on Saturday around noon and assumed they were from someone hunting until seeing the sheriff’s cars in the area.</p> <p>“It’s a horrible, horrible thing,” neighbor Kevin Hejtmancik said. “You hear about it, you never think it’s going to happen across the road.”</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 North Carolina police: 5 dead in home</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/police-person-kills-4-then-himself-in-north-carolina-home/">https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/police-person-kills-4-then-himself-in-north-carolina-home/</a>
GIST	<p>HIGH POINT, N.C. (AP) — Five people were found dead in a North Carolina home after one of them apparently killed the other four and then took their own life, police said.</p> <p>High Point police said in a news release that officers found the bodies of two adults and three minors in the home on Saturday. All were pronounced dead at the scene.</p> <p>Authorities didn’t say how they died, but the news release said the killings were being investigated as a “murder-suicide.” Investigators said there was no ongoing threat to the community.</p> <p>Officers were called to the scene after a man and woman ran from the house screaming, according to the news release. Investigators said they encountered the two people asking for help when they arrived. Police Capt. Matt Truitt told the Greensboro News &amp; Record that the two who fled the home were not harmed.</p>

	<p>Police forced entry into the home and found the victims, according to the news release. Neither identities nor ages of those killed were immediately released.</p> <p>The killings happened in a residential neighborhood of tidy one- and two-story homes northeast of downtown High Point. The area that lies southwest of Greensboro is also about 85 miles (137 km) west of Raleigh.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 How suspect in Idaho slayings was found</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/the-white-sedan-how-police-found-suspect-in-idaho-slayings/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/the-white-sedan-how-police-found-suspect-in-idaho-slayings/</a>
GIST	<p>MOSCOW, Idaho (AP) — The white sedan cruised past the gray, three-story rental home on a dead-end street in Moscow, Idaho. Then again. And again.</p> <p>It was unusual behavior in the residential, hillside neighborhood in the quiet hours before dawn. And according to a police affidavit released Thursday, surveillance videos showing the vehicle that November night were key to unraveling the gruesome mystery of who killed four University of Idaho students inside the house.</p> <p>With little else to go on as a panicked community demanded answers, investigators canvassed security footage from the neighborhood — including one recording of the car speeding away after the slayings — to get a sense of the killer’s possible movements, the affidavit said.</p> <p>Eventually, the document said, police were able to narrow down what was at first known only vaguely as a white sedan to a 2015 Hyundai Elantra registered to Bryan Kohberger, a 28-year-old doctoral student in criminology at Washington State University, just across the border in Pullman, Washington. Further investigation matched Kohberger to DNA at the crime scene, it said.</p> <p>Kohberger made an initial appearance in an Idaho courtroom Thursday following his extradition from Pennsylvania, where he was arrested last week. His attorney didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment, though a public defender who represented him in Pennsylvania, Jason LaBar, has said he is eager to be exonerated and should not be tried “in the court of public opinion.”</p> <p>“Tracking movements in public is an important technique when you haven’t identified any suspects,” said Mary D. Fan, a criminal law professor at the University of Washington. “You can see movements in public even if you don’t have probable cause to get a warrant. We live in a time of ubiquitous cameras. This is a remarkable account of what piecing together that audiovisual data can do.”</p> <p>The car’s first pass by the home was recorded at 3:29 a.m. on Nov. 13 — less than an hour before Kaylee Goncalves, Madison Mogen, Xana Kernodle and Ethan Chapin were stabbed to death in their rooms, Moscow Police Cpl. Brett Payne wrote in the affidavit.</p> <p>The vehicle drove by twice more and was recorded a fourth time at 4:04 a.m., Payne wrote. It wasn’t seen on the footage again until it sped away 16 minutes later.</p> <p>“This is a residential neighborhood with a very limited number of vehicles that travel in the area during the early morning hours,” Payne wrote. “Upon review of the video there are only a few cars that enter and exit this area during this time frame.”</p> <p>A forensic examiner with the FBI determined the car to likely be a 2011-13 Hyundai Elantra, though subsequently said it could be a model as late as 2016, according to the affidavit.</p> <p>Surveillance footage from the Washington State University campus offered further tantalizing information: A similar vehicle headed out of town just before 3 a.m. on the day of the killings and reappeared on cameras in Pullman just before 5:30 a.m., the affidavit said.</p>



On Nov. 25, the Moscow Police Department asked regional law enforcement to look for a white Elantra. Three nights later, a WSU police officer ran a query for any white Elantras on campus.

One came back as having a Pennsylvania license plate and being registered to Kohberger. Within half an hour, another campus officer located the vehicle parked at Kohberger's apartment complex. It came back as having Washington state tags. Five days after the killings, Kohberger had switched the registration from Pennsylvania, his home state, to Washington, the affidavit said.

Investigators now had a name to go on, and further investigation yielded more clues. Kohberger's driver's license described him as 6 feet tall and 185 pounds, and his license photo showed him to have bushy eyebrows — all details consistent with a description of the attacker given by a surviving roommate, the affidavit said.

More research revealed that Kohberger had been pulled over by a Latah County, Idaho, sheriff's deputy in August while driving the Elantra. He gave the deputy a cellphone number.

Armed with that number, Payne obtained search warrants for the phone's historical data. The location data showed the phone was near his home in Pullman until about 2:42 a.m. on the morning of the killings. Five minutes later, the phone started using cellular resources located southeast of the home — consistent with Kohberger traveling south, the affidavit said.

There was no other location data available from the phone until 4:48 a.m., suggesting Kohberger may have turned it off during the attack in an effort to avoid detection, the affidavit said. At that point, the phone began taking a roundabout route back to Pullman, traveling south to Genesee, Idaho, then west to Uniontown, Washington, and north to Pullman just before 5:30 a.m. — around the same time the white sedan showed back up on surveillance cameras in town.

It remains unclear why the victims were targeted.

Kohberger opened the account for the phone on June 23, the affidavit said, and location data showed that he had traveled to the neighborhood where the victims were killed at least a dozen times before the attacks. Those visits all came late in the evening or early in the morning, the affidavit said, and it was on one of those trips that he was pulled over by the sheriff's deputy on Aug. 21.

The cellphone data also included another chilling detail, the affidavit said: The phone returned to the victims' neighborhood hours after the attack, around 9 a.m. But even though one of the surviving housemates had seen a strange man inside and heard crying after 4 a.m., the killings were not reported to police until later that day, and there was no police response at the scene by 9.

Though Kohberger, with his 2015 Elantra, had first come to the attention of WSU police by Nov. 29, it's not clear how soon that information was relayed to the Moscow Police Department, which issued a news release on Dec. 7 asking for the public's help in finding a white 2011-13 Elantra. The release suggested such a vehicle had been near the home early on Nov. 13 and that any occupants "may have critical information to share regarding this case."

Law enforcement agencies sometimes use such public statements to throw off suspects and keep them from learning they are under suspicion. Tips poured in and investigators soon announced they were sifting through a pool of around 20,000 potential vehicles.

"I think they got a lot of flack for keeping their cards tight to their chest ... so I was pretty elated when they caught this guy and all this evidence was revealed," said Telisa Swan, a Moscow resident who put a sign thanking the police outside her business.

	<p>Kohberger apparently remained at WSU until mid-December, when he drove to his parents' house in Pennsylvania, accompanied by his father, in the Elantra. While driving through Indiana, Kohberger was pulled over twice on the same day for tailgating.</p> <p>On Dec. 27, police in Pennsylvania recovered trash from the Kohberger family home and sent DNA evidence to Idaho, the affidavit said. The evidence matched the DNA found on the button snap of a knife sheath recovered at the crime scene, it said.</p> <p>Kohberger is charged with four counts of first-degree murder and felony burglary. A status hearing in the case is set for Jan. 12.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 WSU students: suspect arrest stunning</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/ws-u-students-kohberger-spoke-up-in-class-except-when-moscow-killings-were-the-topic/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/ws-u-students-kohberger-spoke-up-in-class-except-when-moscow-killings-were-the-topic/</a>
GIST	<p>Graduate school peers of Bryan Kohberger recall him as actively engaged in their Washington State University criminal justice and criminology program — someone who sought connections while also sharing little about his past in his first semester as a doctoral student.</p> <p>Kohberger — <a href="#">the man charged</a> with four counts of first-degree murder in the killing of four University of Idaho students — presented a social aptitude with colleagues, making casual conversation between classes, two master's students who shared several first-year courses with him told The Idaho Statesman.</p> <p>That lined up with Kohberger's demeanor at the program's orientation last fall, when he was one of the first people to introduce himself to others in their group of 13 incoming students, one of his classmates said.</p> <p>"He seemed gregarious and outgoing, that was really the only impression that I got," Ben Roberts, a criminal justice graduate student, said in a phone interview with the Statesman. "He was making the rounds. He definitely seemed a little more eager than some of the others that were present to go around and introduce himself."</p> <p>During class, Kohberger, 28, appeared academic-minded and didn't shy away from speaking up, including challenging his classmates, said Roberts, and another master's degree student to whom The Statesman granted anonymity to answer emailed questions.</p> <p>Kohberger's enthusiasm for his area of study — understanding the criminal mind — was regularly on display, they said.</p> <p>"Bryan only talked about his interest in forensic psychology," the master's student told The Statesman. "He was an incredibly strong student and talked during class every time."</p> <p>"He sat front and center, and was not hiding or tucking back in the back," Roberts added. "He was right there in the middle of it."</p> <p>As a result, Kohberger's nonparticipation in a lengthy conversation about the Moscow homicides stands out in retrospect, said the master's student. The person said they had four classes with the man now sitting in the Latah County Jail, including a courts and legal process class where the killings were discussed before the semester ended the week of Dec. 12.</p> <p>"He was completely silent," Kohberger's classmate said.</p> <p>Kohberger, who faces a felony burglary charge in addition to the murder counts, is accused in the Nov. 13 stabbing deaths of U of I seniors Madison Mogen, 21, of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, and Kaylee Goncalves, 21, of Rathdrum, Idaho; junior Xana Kernodle, 20, of Post Falls, Idaho; and freshman Ethan Chapin, 20, of Conway, Skagit County.</p>

The three women lived together in an off-campus rental house, while Chapin was staying over for the night with Kernodle, his girlfriend.

Police began looking at Kohberger as a suspect as early as Nov. 29, according to the 19-page probable cause affidavit unsealed Thursday. Law enforcement arrested Kohberger at his family's home in Monroe County, Pennsylvania, on Dec. 30 while he visited them over the holiday break from school. He waived extradition last Tuesday, was flown to Pullman and [driven to Moscow to jail](#) on Wednesday, and made his first Idaho court appearance on Thursday.

**WSU student: 'This is something that affects people'**

Kohberger was one of 34 students in Washington State's criminal justice and criminology graduate program. The Statesman obtained the information in a review of the program's website that identified each of the students, before the university took it down after the Moscow Police Department announced Kohberger's arrest.

"We removed the webpage containing the listing and contact information for graduate students in the CJC department," [the link read](#) Friday, citing privacy protections and directing all media inquiries to a school spokesperson. "We stand in sympathy with the families of the victims of this horrible crime and remain dedicated to the pursuit of justice."

The website previously showed the program comprised 24 Ph.D. students, including Kohberger, and 10 students pursuing their master's degrees. Prior attempts by the Statesman to reach members of the program did not receive a response, beyond the two master's students who agreed to interviews.

Kohberger also was listed as an assistant instructor for three undergraduate criminal justice courses led by professor John Snyder, the department's criminal justice club adviser and global director. The university has since removed his name online in that teaching assistant role, too.

Snyder declined to comment when reached on his cellphone by The Statesman the day of Kohberger's arrest. The department's chair, graduate program director and three of Kohberger's other WSU course instructors also declined Statesman requests for comment through the university spokesperson.

Roberts, one of only four men in the graduate program outside of Kohberger, agreed to a few interviews, including with The Statesman.

In a handful of conversations outside of the classroom with Kohberger, Roberts said, the two talked a little about music and sports, and Kohberger at one point mentioned he liked to hike. The discussions were just "pretty typical icebreaker" chats between new colleagues, Roberts said, including how Pullman was much different from the places where each of them grew up.

In class, Kohberger mostly came off as professional, Roberts said, although he said he was put off when Kohberger began to consistently show himself to be more forceful and condescending with women during seminar discussions.

"It's hard to see a pattern emerging while you're in the classroom, but he would tend to push back when a female was talking, more than a male talking," Roberts said. "He was more keen on asking probing questions and things like that."

After the Nov. 13 knife attacks that left four undergraduates dead in Moscow, neither student recalled Kohberger with any injuries or behaving in any way out of the ordinary, they said. The master's student who spoke anonymously said they had a class with Kohberger on Nov. 15 and don't remember anything that stood out.

For Roberts, the allegations against and arrest of Kohberger remains stunning, and he continues to feel a sense of unease, he said.

	<p>Much has been thrown into disarray, Roberts said, as the WSU department built around educating students on why people commit horrific crimes is forced to confront the fact that one of its own now stands accused of perpetrating such an incident.</p> <p>“The stories you’re reading in the paper, the cases you’re reviewing, the studies you’re doing, it can become easy to forget that they’re connected to real people, and it’s the real world and real consequences,” Roberts said. “People lose people, and find their kid’s bed empty. There’s a real heaviness looking at that and realizing and remembering, this is not just some sterile academic subject. This is something that affects people.”</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/08 Idaho police took mounting criticism, heat</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/08/us/idaho-student-killings-investigation-bryan-kohberger/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/08/us/idaho-student-killings-investigation-bryan-kohberger/index.html</a>
GIST	<p>In the weeks after <a href="#">four University of Idaho students</a> were found stabbed to death in a home near campus, police faced mounting criticism from the public as the investigation appeared to be at a standstill.</p> <p>In fact, court documents show, a team of local and state law enforcement officers, along with a slew of FBI agents, were working meticulously through the holiday season to catch the alleged killer.</p> <p>Weeks before making an arrest on December 30, investigators began setting their sights on <a href="#">Bryan Kohberger</a>, a 28-year-old PhD student in criminology at a nearby university who has been charged with four counts of first-degree murder and one count of burglary.</p> <p>“I bristled in the days after the arrest when people questioned whether police had the right man because a PhD candidate in criminal justice would be too smart for this crime,” said John Miller, a CNN law enforcement analyst and former New York Police Department deputy commissioner. “You can teach a master’s class on how to do a complex criminal investigation based on this case.”</p> <p><b>‘We cannot say there is no threat’</b></p> <p>The brutal nature of the November 13 killings set off a <a href="#">wave of fear and anxiety</a> in Moscow, a small college town on the Idaho-Washington border that had not reported a murder in seven years.</p> <p>Police found the door to the off-campus residence open and the bodies of <a href="#">Kaylee Goncalves, 21, Madison Mogen, 21, Xana Kernodle, 20, and 20-year-old Ethan Chapin</a> in rooms on the second and third floors. Two other young women were in the three-floor, six-bedroom rental at the time but were not injured, according to police.</p> <p>Latah County Coroner Cathy Mabbutt told CNN she saw “lots of blood on the wall” when she arrived at the scene. She said there were multiple stab wounds on each body, likely from the same weapon. One victim had what appeared to be defensive stab wounds on the hands.</p> <p>Moscow police initially told the public the attack was targeted and there was no threat to the community. Days later, however, Police Chief Jason Fry backtracked: “We cannot say that there is no threat to the community,” he said. Many students began to <a href="#">leave town</a>.</p> <p><b>The chorus of criticism grows</b></p> <p>Authorities remained tight-lipped, withholding details of the crime and some of the leads they were tracking. For weeks, law enforcement officials said they had not identified a suspect or located the murder weapon.</p> <p>Jim Chapin, the father of Ethan Chapin, said in a November 16 statement that the lack of information from the university and local police “further compounds our family’s agony after our son’s murder.”</p>

“For Ethan and his three dear friends slain in Moscow, Idaho, and all of our families, I urge officials to speak the truth, share what they know, find the assailant, and protect the greater community,” the statement said.

As frustrations continued to mount, pundits and relatives of the victims became even more critical of the apparent lack of progress in the case.

“It takes a while to put together and piece together that whole timeline of events and the picture of really what occurred,” Idaho State Police spokesman Aaron Snell said on November 22, nine days after the killings. “A lot of this the public doesn’t get to see because it’s a criminal investigation. But I guarantee you behind the scenes, there’s so much work going on.”

One day later, [Steve Goncalves, Kaylee’s dad, told CNN](#) he was focused on securing justice for his daughter, despite the dearth of information.

“We all want to play a part in helping, and we can’t play a part if we don’t have any real substantial information to work from,” he said.

Asked what he’d heard from local police, Goncalves said, “They’re not sharing much with me.” He suggested Moscow police might be limited in what they can share.

#### **Local police willing to ‘take it on the chin’**

One bit of information initially not shared publicly was that a review of surveillance footage from the area around the home brought to investigators’ attention a white sedan, later identified as a Hyundai Elantra, according to a [probable cause affidavit released Thursday](#) in the case against Kohberger.

By November 25, law enforcement in the area had been notified to be on the lookout for such a vehicle, the affidavit said.

And several days later, officers at nearby Washington State University, where the suspect was a graduate student in the criminal justice program, identified a white Elantra and subsequently found it was registered to Kohberger.

This was just part of the behind-the-scenes work in a [complex quadruple homicide investigation](#) where any hint to the public about a suspect or the various leads police are following can cause it to fall apart, according to experts.

“We don’t want to tip off suspects or spook them so that they end up going on the run. We don’t want them trying to get rid of evidence or destroy things,” said Joe Giacalone, adjunct professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and a retired NYPD sergeant who directed the department’s homicide school and the Bronx cold case squad.

“There’s a lot of people in the public that need to apologize to the police department,” Giacalone said. “That Moscow, Idaho, police chief took a beating and he kept on moving ahead.”

Miller agreed: “They were willing to take it on the chin, from the public, from the press, from local critics, in order to keep the case clean and keep the investigation going.”

#### **Witness account was not revealed until arrest**

One crucial clue not shared by police was that one of the two roommates who survived told investigators she saw a masked man dressed in black in the house the morning of the attack, according to the probable cause affidavit.

The roommate, identified in the document as D.M., said she “heard crying” in the house that morning and a male voice say, “It’s ok, I’m going to help you.” D.M. said she then saw a “figure clad in black clothing and a mask that covered the person’s mouth and nose walking towards her,” the document said.

“D.M. described the figure as 5’ 10” or taller, male, not very muscular, but athletically built with bushy eyebrows,” according to the affidavit. “The male walked past D.M. as she stood in a ‘frozen shock phase.’”

Kohberger’s driver’s license information, which was reviewed by investigators in late November, turned out to be consistent with the description provided by the surviving roommate, the affidavit said, noting specifically his height and his “bushy eyebrows.”

Armed with driver’s license and plate information, investigators were able to obtain phone records that indicated Kohberger’s phone was near the victims’ residence at least 12 times between June 2022 to the present day, the affidavit said.

Those records also showed that Kohberger’s phone was near the crime scene again after the killings, between 9:12 a.m. and 9:21 a.m., the document said.

### **Multiple agencies came together**

“For weeks before the arrest, so called experts, pundits and some in the press criticized the Moscow police for not being up to the task and for not having an arrest,” Miller said. “It’s not like ‘Law & Order,’ ‘Blue Bloods’ or ‘CSI.’”

From the morning the murders were discovered, Miller said, the Moscow police knew they needed help and brought in the state police homicide squad and the FBI.

“What the Moscow police had, that the FBI and the state police could never have, was they knew the area,” Miller said. “They knew the community and they knew the people and they had a very engaged community. But the FBI brought technical prowess and expertise. And what the state police brought was experience in homicide investigations and a state-of-the-art lab.”

By mid December the public [criticism of the police department continued to grow](#) as few details of the investigation were made public.

But the court documents show that investigators worked through the holidays to build their case, which included DNA found at the scene of the killings and at the Pennsylvania home of Kohberger’s family.

“The general public tends to think all of this happens overnight,” said retired FBI profiler Mary Ellen O’Toole. “You have a group of investigators from different agencies coming together and working together. It’s very challenging.”

### **Affidavit reveals key case details**

Investigators learned that Kohberger received a new license plate for his Elantra five days after the killings, the affidavit said, citing records from the Washington State Department of Licensing.

At the scene of the killings, investigators found a tan leather knife sheath on the bed next to one of the victims, the affidavit said. On its button snap, the Idaho State Lab would later find a single source of male DNA.

Late last month, Pennsylvania law enforcement recovered trash from Kohberger’s family home in Albrightsville, according to the affidavit. That evidence, too, was sent to the Idaho State Lab.

The DNA in the trash is believed to belong to the biological father of the person whose DNA was found on the sheath, the document said.

On December 29, authorities requested an arrest warrant for Kohberger on four counts of first-degree murder and burglary, according to the affidavit.



<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	<p>The next day, a Pennsylvania State Police SWAT team moved in on the Kohberger family home. They broke down the door and broke through windows in what is known as a “dynamic entry” – a rare tactic used to arrest “high risk” suspects, a law enforcement source told CNN.</p> <p>Kohberger was booked into the Latah County jail last week after being extradited from Pennsylvania. The affidavit, with many previously unknown details of the case, was released Thursday as the suspect made his first court appearance in Idaho.</p> <p>Kohberger did not enter a plea and he is due back in court on Thursday. A court order prohibits the prosecution and defense from commenting beyond the public records of the case.</p> <p>Moscow police “took a lot of criticism and a lot of heat in those seven weeks after the incident,” University of Idaho Provost and Executive Vice President Torrey Lawrence told CNN. “And I’m just so thankful that they stayed committed to that case and to sharing only what they could share so that they didn’t disrupt the investigation... If they had shared more, we could wonder would Mr. Kohberger have been able to elude them.”</p>
-------------------------------	---

<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/08 Nigeria: gunmen kidnap train passengers</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/nigeria-government-abuja-67d19b257dd611e0b038f7c0480d71c7">https://apnews.com/article/nigeria-government-abuja-67d19b257dd611e0b038f7c0480d71c7</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — Gunmen abducted several passengers at a train station in southern Nigeria, according to police.</p> <p>Armed men attacked the station in Igueben town in Edo State kidnapping an unknown number of people waiting to board, said Chidi Nwabuzor, the police spokesman for Edo State, in a statement.</p> <p>The kidnappers “shot sporadically into the air” before taking the passengers, leaving some with bullet wounds, Nwabuzor said. Rescue operations are underway to find the victims and arrest the abductors.</p> <p>The incident on Saturday night is the latest in a series targeting train stations in the West African nation.</p> <p>Last year, gunmen attacked a train near the capital city, Abuja, killing seven people and abducting several others. Saturday’s attack is the first in southern Nigeria, raising concerns among the population that the gunmen are expanding their reach.</p> <p>The violence is often carried out by young cattle herders fighting with rural villages for access to land and water, security officials say.</p> <p>Nigeria’s government is trying to stem growing insecurity in the country ahead of next month’s presidential elections. While authorities have promised to increase security at train stations, conflict analysts warn the nation’s security forces are overstretched.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/08 How police nabbed Idaho killings suspect</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/08/idaho-murders-police-suspect-killings">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/08/idaho-murders-police-suspect-killings</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>For a student of criminology, Bryan Kohberger appears to have been remarkably indifferent to modern methods of detective work.</p> <p>The accused murderer of four friends at the University of <a href="#">Idaho</a>, who were repeatedly stabbed in their beds with a large knife, was snared by procedures that are the nuts and bolts of police television dramas: cameras tracking his car, cellphone records placing him at the scene, and a search of DNA records collected by genealogy websites that threw up a match with Kohberger’s family.</p> <p>Yet, according to court statements, despite years of studying police methods, the 28-year-old left a trail of evidence as he allegedly stalked and attacked his victims. He took some decisions, they allege, such as</p>

turning his cellphone off during the murders, that only heightened suspicion he was the killer. Police say that Kohberger even returned to the scene of the crime in the hours after the murders.

But even as the police claimed to have got their man, accusing Kohberger of four counts of first-degree murder, key questions remained unanswered. Was there a connection between the criminal justice student's interest in serial killers and the murders? And why did a surviving housemate wait hours to call the police after apparently encountering the killer outside her room in the middle of the night?

The horrific stabbings of the four young students at their home in Moscow, a small city in the far west of Idaho, in the early hours of 13 November, has shocked America and prompted one of the most intense criminal investigations in Idaho's history, drawing in dozens of FBI agents.

Kaylee Goncalves and Madison Mogen, both 21, were in the same bed on the third floor when they were repeatedly stabbed with a long knife, according to the coroner's report.

"They've been friends since sixth grade," Goncalves's father, Steve, [told a candlelight vigil](#) of more than 1,000 people for his daughter. "Every day they did homework together, they came to our house together, they shared everything. And in the end, they died together, in the same room, in the same bed. And it's a shame, and it hurts."

Xana Kernodle and her boyfriend, Ethan Chapin, were asleep on the floor below when police allege Kohberger burst in and also killed the two 20-year-olds. A photograph taken hours before their deaths shows four students smiling together, with Mogen sitting on Goncalves's shoulders while Chapin has his arm around Kernodle.

Incredibly, another two students, Bethany Funke and Dylan Mortensen, remained unharmed in the house even after Mortensen encountered the killer as he left the building.

Mortensen told police she woke at about 4am and heard noises upstairs. She thought it was one of her housemates playing with her dog but then heard one of the women say: "There's someone here."

The student stuck her head out of her bedroom but didn't see anything. A little later she heard what sounded like crying and a man say: "It's OK, I'm going to help you." A security camera on a neighboring home picked up the sound of whimpering, a loud thud and a dog barking.

Mortensen looked out of her bedroom again and this time saw a man in black wearing what looked like a ski mask over his nose and mouth. She described him as having bushy eyebrows.

According to a court affidavit, the student told the police she stood in "frozen shock" as the killer walked past her and out of the back door. She then locked herself in the bedroom.

That leaves one of the great mysteries of the case. Why did neither Mortensen nor Funke immediately call the police? It was nearly another eight hours before one of them dialled 911 to request help for "an unconscious person".

More than 60 FBI agents were eventually called in to help investigate the killings. But initially it was left to Moscow's police department. One of its officers, Corporal Brett Payne, said in a statement that he arrived at the King Road residence at about 4pm.

"As I entered this bedroom, I could see two females in a single bed in the room. Both Goncalves and Mogen were deceased with visible stab wounds," he said.

Payne spotted a key piece of evidence the killer might have been expected to ensure he took with him.

"I noticed what appeared to be a tan leather knife sheath lying on the bed next to Mogen's right side." The police sent the sheath to the state crime lab.

Meanwhile, detectives scoured video footage from cameras in the area and picked out a white Hyundai Elantra driving past the house three times before stopping on the fourth pass shortly after 4am. The car left 16 minutes later “at a high rate of speed”, according to Payne.

The video footage did not capture the vehicle’s number and police officers in the region were told to keep a lookout for cars that matched the Hyundai’s description. Two weeks after the killings, an officer spotted the car in Pullman, a 15-minute drive across the state border from Moscow. It was parked outside the residence of a student at Washington State University – Kohberger.

When detectives looked at the picture on his driving licence they noted the bushy eyebrows.

Investigators were also interested in Kohberger’s academic history. He had completed a master’s degree in psychology and criminal justice at DeSales University, a Catholic institution in his home state of [Pennsylvania](#), in the summer. There he studied under Katherine Ramsland, a forensic psychologist whose books include an account of her long correspondence with one of the US’s most infamous serial killers, Dennis Rader, known as the BTK, or Blind, Torture, Kill, murderer.

In the autumn, Kohberger began a PhD at the [criminal justice and criminology department](#) at Washington State. Fellow students said he showed a particular interest in serial killers.

But Kohberger was also interested in more mundane aspects of police work. Not long after beginning his course in Pullman he applied for an internship at the local police department, the same one that was now part of the murder investigation, saying that he was interested in helping rural police departments collect and analyse data.

The police also noted that Kohberger returned to classes after the killings. The New York Post [reported](#) that he sat silently through discussion among fellow students about the Moscow murders.

Even though police had identified the car, they did not seize it. In December, Kohberger’s father flew out to join his son for a road trip back to the family home in Pennsylvania in the same vehicle. The pair were stopped twice by Indiana police for minor driving offences on the same day. Police [body-camera footage](#) shows Kohberger in the driver’s seat with his father next to him.

Meanwhile, FBI investigators trawled through Kohberger’s cellphone records and discovered that he turned it off shortly before the attack, perhaps thinking it would help him to avoid detection. The phone springs to life again at 4.48am on a road out of Moscow.

The records also showed that Kohberger was in the area near the house at least a dozen times in the months before the attack, usually in the early morning or late evenings. Investigators said they were examining whether he “conducted surveillance on the King Road residents and was in contact with any of the victim’s associates before or after the alleged offense”.

There was one other detail that struck investigators. Their suspect had apparently returned to the vicinity of the crime about five hours later and before the police were called.

The public was told none of this, and what appeared to be the slow pace of the investigation frustrated the parents of the victims. Three weeks after the killings, Goncalves’s father began to publicly question whether the Moscow police were up to the task of finding the murderer. Some students left town as the mystery around the killings grew, fearing that a serial killer was on the loose.

But away from the public eye, investigators were certain they were closing in on their man.

The Idaho state laboratory found a DNA sample on the sheath which it sent on to the FBI’s genetic genealogy branch. The FBI trawled through public databases until a match led to the Kohberger family.

	<p>On 27 December, undercover agents seized rubbish from the family home in Chestnuthill Township, Pennsylvania, to scour for matching DNA. The FBI lab made a 99.98% match between Kohberger's father and the sample on the knife sheath.</p> <p>Undercover investigators watched their suspect for days until, at 1.45am on 30 December, the police smashed their way through windows and doors into the Kohberger house to make the arrest.</p> <p>At a court appearance in Moscow on Thursday, Kohberger said little except to acknowledge that he potentially faces the death penalty if convicted. The accused man's lawyer said his client "looks forward to being exonerated".</p> <p>The families of their victims, along with the rest of America, now await answers to the biggest question of all. Why?</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Frequency of family murder-suicide killings</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/7/utah-murder-suicide-underscores-frequency-of-famil/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/7/utah-murder-suicide-underscores-frequency-of-famil/</a>
GIST	<p>ENOCH, Utah — City leaders in a small Utah town choked up this week as they expressed shock after a murder-suicide carried out by a fellow church member left eight people dead in their close-knit community, including five children who were classmates with their kids.</p> <p>Though shocking, family mass killings are an all-too-common tragedy across the country. They've happened nearly every 3.5 weeks for the last two decades on average, according to a database compiled by USA Today, The Associated Press and Northeastern University.</p> <p>Enoch, Utah, is one of more than 30 communities sent reeling by a family mass killing in the last two years, a list that includes communities of wealth and poverty and spares no race or class. A family mass killing - where four or more people were killed, not including the perpetrator - happened each of the last two years in places as large as Houston or as small as Casa Grande, Arizona, the database shows.</p> <p>The circumstances of the killings are myriad: An argument over pandemic stimulus checks leaves four family members shot dead and two injured in Indianapolis; financial issues lead to authorities finding six children and their parents inside a house set ablaze in Oklahoma; an escalating custody battle in Ohio precedes a man and members of his family shooting the mother of his child and seven of her family members; a father loses his job, piles his wife and kids in the family station wagon and plunges it into the Detroit River.</p> <p>Motives can remain speculative in family killings in which assailants take their own lives, but police often cite financial or relationship issues as the causes.</p> <p>Enoch police are still investigating what led to the deaths discovered Wednesday, but authorities said Tausha Haight had recently filed a divorce petition against her husband Michael, a 42-year-old insurance agent who they believe killed her, their five children and Tausha's mother, who was staying at the family's home.</p> <p>Officials have not released information on the weapon they believe killed the adults and the children, who ranged in age from 4 to 17. A relative of Tausha Haight said Friday that the family was left "vulnerable" after Michael Haight removed guns he and his wife owned in the days before the murder-suicide.</p> <p>Police went to the Haight's home on Wednesday in response to a welfare check call placed when Tausha Haight missed an appointment.</p> <p>The news left mothers, fathers, teachers and churchgoers asking a question many communities face in the aftermath of mass shootings: How could this happen here?</p>

City Councilman Rob Jensen said he was well aware such tragedies happen throughout the country, yet that did little to quell the shock he felt when the killings happened in his town.

“Especially in a small town, you don’t anticipate this kind of thing. Nobody does,” Jensen said. “Everyone knows this kind of thing can happen. But everyone wants to say that it’s not them.”

Family mass killings immediately capture the attention of people in a community, but rarely garner the level of national attention received by mass killings at schools, places of worship or restaurants, said James Alan Fox, a criminologist at Northeastern University who has studied familicides and mass killings for decades.

Fox, who helped compile and maintains the database for the AP and USA Today, said that’s because it doesn’t carry the same kind of fear with the public. He noted police often issue messages saying there is no danger to the public shortly after the killings are discovered.

“It’s a nice safe community, but family massacres are independent of the crime rate in the local area,” he said. “We are talking about internal factors, and I think that’s why it’s hard for people to see themselves in these situations and why the response is to mourn instead of fear.”

Family mass killings are in fact the most common type of mass killing, making up about 45% of the 415 mass shootings since 2006, according to the database. They happen twice as frequently as mass shootings in which members of the public are killed.

Most, but not all, involve handguns, only about a third involve households with a previous occurrence of domestic violence and most of the assailants have no violent history or criminal past, Fox said.

There is no governmental agency tracking murder-suicides nationally, so a few years ago policy analysts at the Violence Policy Center - a nonprofit educational organization that conducts research and public education on violence in the U.S. - began tracking details from news accounts to produce an annual report. The latest version from 2020 looked at murder-suicides including many mass killings during the first six months of 2019.

The study found 81% of murder-suicides happened at home and 65% involved intimate partners. The study also found that among murder-suicides where more than three people aside from the assailant were killed, six of the 10 during those six months were incidents in which a person killed their children, partner and themselves.

Fox said most of the killings fall into two categories. The first is murder by proxy, in which the killer is motivated by anger or resentment and kills the children who are seen as an extension of their partner. The second is suicide by proxy motivated by despondency or depression, most often a job loss, and the assailant kills the children as an extension of themselves.

“He wants to spare them the misery of living in this awful world,” Fox said. “Over the years, there’s been an eclipse in community. There was a time decades ago if you had trouble feeding your family or if you had lost your job, neighbors would come over with casseroles and they would offer emotional support. Many people don’t know their neighbors these days.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/07 Questions, murky path in VA shooting
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/07/us/virginia-shooting-richneck-elementary.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/07/us/virginia-shooting-richneck-elementary.html</a>
GIST	<p>NEWPORT NEWS, Va. — The scene was heartbreakingly familiar. Inside Richneck Elementary School, children and teachers hunkered down in fear. At a family reunification center nearby, desperate parents waited for answers. Some were so panicked that they struggled to breathe. Once again, a school shooting had left a community reeling.</p> <p>Only this time, the authorities said, the gun had been fired by a 6-year-old boy.</p>

The incident, which initially set off fears about potential mass violence, quickly morphed into another kind of tragedy: a rare example of a school shooting involving an exceptionally young child.

The 6-year-old, a first grader at Richneck Elementary in Newport News, Va., shot a teacher with a handgun on Friday afternoon, the Newport News Police Department said, in an incident that the police said was “not an accidental shooting.” The boy and the teacher had been involved in an altercation in a classroom before the boy shot the teacher once, the police said. The teacher suffered “life-threatening” injuries but had improved by Saturday and was in stable condition.

Police radio traffic posted online by Broadcastify, a streaming service, captured the chaotic moments as a dispatcher communicated with officers responding to the scene.

“We have a female victim shot in the abdomen,” the dispatcher said. She added that the victim had also been shot through the hand and was waiting for medical assistance in the school’s office, where she was “in and out of consciousness.”

A medic was also called to a nearby church, where some parents were reported to be hyperventilating as they waited for information.

It took only six days for the country to register its first school shooting of 2023, [according to a tracker by Education Week](#), a count that is almost certain to grow as school shootings become [more common](#) in the United States. Outside Richneck Elementary, a sprawling, green-roofed building in a quiet neighborhood of Newport News, the school’s sign on Saturday still read “Happy New Year.”

Yet school shootings by young children are exceedingly rare, experts say. The [K-12 School Shooting Database](#), which has compiled data on every gun incident at a school — anytime a firearm has been discharged on school property — dating back to 1970, has identified just 16 incidents involving shooters under the age of 10, and even fewer by children as young as 6.

The situation in Newport News left many shaken, with major questions still unanswered.

Among them: How did a 6-year-old child obtain access to a gun? The authorities have not publicly identified the child or the teacher, detailed the nature of the altercation or offered information about whether the gun was taken from home, school or elsewhere.

The boy was in police custody Friday evening, the authorities said, but the unusual nature of the situation leaves the path forward far from clear. While it is possible that the child could be criminally charged, legal scrutiny could also fall on the child’s parents or another adult. Virginia law prohibits leaving a loaded gun where it is accessible to children under the age of 14.

On Saturday, some families were left in a stunned grief.

“It’s scary,” said Ramon Gonzalez-Hernandez, who said his son was in the classroom where the teacher was shot.

“I’m just here trying to keep my son occupied so he’s not thinking about everything,” Mr. Gonzalez-Hernandez added, speaking briefly from his porch. He said he was waiting to hear from detectives to set up counseling sessions and was considering whether to home-school his son.

Tucked on a quiet street where parents and children can often be seen walking in the neighborhood, Richneck Elementary serves a diverse student body of more than 550 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Newport News, a city of about 185,000 in southeast Virginia, is home to a large military community and is known for its shipyard, which builds aircraft carriers and other vessels for the U.S. Navy.



Daniel Smith, 51, who lives near the elementary school, said he was surprised by the shooting because the surrounding neighborhood is generally safe. “We’re a quiet neighborhood,” he said. “Nobody bothers anybody and they look out for each other.”

The shooting renewed calls from teachers’ unions and gun control groups for tougher laws to keep guns out of schools, including laws requiring safe storage. “When will the shock of gunshots in school be enough to inspire the action necessary to prevent guns in schools and the shattering of lives it causes?” Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, said in a statement.

Virginia, unlike some other states — notably Oregon and Massachusetts — does not have a broad law that requires all guns to be safely stored in homes.

“Virginia’s law is on the weaker end of the spectrum of these types of laws,” said Allison Anderman, senior counsel and director of local policy at Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

The state’s Republican governor, Glenn Youngkin, said on Saturday that he believed Virginia already had “some of the toughest gun laws in the nation” but that the next step was to invest more money in mental health treatment and to pass tougher penalties for crimes committed with guns.

In a state budget proposed last month, ahead of the Legislature’s 2023 session next week, the governor requested \$230 million for increased capacity to respond to people with mental health issues, including mobile crisis teams, expanded mental health care in schools and same-day care for people in crisis. He also said on Saturday, during a brief interview in Virginia Beach, that he wanted the Legislature to enact tougher penalties for gun crimes, though it was unclear whether either initiative would address how a 6-year-old was able to wield a loaded handgun in school.

Under Virginia law, a 6-year-old cannot be charged as an adult. And while it is possible the child could be charged criminally in juvenile court, the minimum age to be sentenced to a juvenile prison in Virginia is 11.

“The juvenile justice system is not really equipped to deal with really young kids who commit criminal offenses and is probably the wrong place to deal with a situation like this,” said Andrew Block, a professor at the University of Virginia School of Law and the former director of the Virginia Department of Justice.

The unsettling situation in Virginia comes as greater attention is being paid to gun violence in elementary schools, especially after a gunman killed 19 students and two teachers at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, last year.

In the 2020-21 school year, the most recent year for which data is available, 59 elementary schools reported an incident involving a gun, up from 32 the prior year and up from single digits as recently as 2016, according to data from the K-12 School Shooting Database reported by the [National Center for Education Statistics](#).

Not all of the incidents, though, resulted in injury or death. The count includes incidents in which a gun was brandished or fired, or a bullet hit school property, regardless of motive or whether someone was hurt.

“It’s not necessarily that shootings are increasing based on how those incidents are defined, but that the presence of firearms is increasing,” said Jaclyn Schildkraut, the interim executive director of the Regional Gun Violence Research Consortium at the Rockefeller Institute of Government.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	01/07 ‘Damaging spy’ for Cuba released from jail
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ana-montes-spy-for-cuba-released-from-prison/">https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ana-montes-spy-for-cuba-released-from-prison/</a>
GIST	Ana Montes, a former analyst for the Defense Intelligence Agency, the U.S. military's spy arm, walked free from a federal prison in Fort Worth, Texas, on Friday after more than 20 years behind bars.

Montes spied for Cuba for 17 years, revealing the identities of the United States' undercover intelligence officers and its highly sensitive collection capabilities, until her arrest in 2001. By day, she was the Defense Intelligence Agency's senior Cuba analyst. At night, she typed up pages and pages of government secrets that she had memorized, passing them to Cuban intelligence.

Michelle Van Cleave, who was head of U.S. counterintelligence under President George W. Bush, [told](#) Congress in 2012 that Montes was "one of the most damaging spies the United States has ever found."

"She compromised everything — virtually everything — that we knew about Cuba and how we operated in Cuba and against Cuba," Van Cleave said. "So the Cubans were well aware of everything that we knew about them and could use that to their advantage. In addition, she was able to influence estimates about Cuba in her conversations with colleagues and she also found an opportunity to provide information that she acquired to other powers."

Her spying took place around the same time that Robert Hanssen and Aldrich Ames spied for the Soviet and Russian intelligence services while they worked for the FBI and CIA, respectively. (Both are serving life sentences in prison.) But Montes' case was somewhat different. Hanssen and Ames took large sums of money for their spying and physically removed classified materials from their agencies.

Montes was instead motivated by ideology. Her decision to spy was based in part on her hostility toward President Ronald Reagan's policies on Latin America, especially U.S. support of the Nicaragua Contras, according to [a heavily redacted report](#) from the Defense Department's inspector general.

Montes was recruited by Cuban intelligence in 1984, when she was approached by a fellow student at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University after she expressed her outrage about U.S. actions in Nicaragua. The student was an access agent — someone who recruits spies — and introduced her to a Cuban intelligence official under the guise that they needed Spanish language news articles about Nicaragua translated into English. At dinner in New York City, Montes "unhesitatingly agreed to work through the Cubans to 'help' Nicaragua," the inspector general's report said.

She then began her espionage career with a secret trip to Cuba, where she received training from Cuban intelligence. By the end of 1985 she was working at the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency — possibly at the direction of the Cubans — where she had access to top secret information.

In the following years, Montes met with her Cuban handlers every few weeks at restaurants around Washington, D.C. She visited pay phones to send coded messages to pagers used by the Cubans. She received her orders from numeric messages transmitted over shortwave radio. She also took the risk of traveling to Cuba to meet with people there.

As Montes climbed the career ladder and received a number of accolades for her work, the FBI got a tip about a U.S. government employee who appeared to be spying for the Cubans, leading the bureau to eventually begin investigating Montes, according to a 2013 [Washington Post story](#).

She was arrested days after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks as the Defense Intelligence Agency shifted its focus to Afghanistan and the director did not want to risk Montes passing along the Pentagon's war plans.

Pete Lapp, one of the FBI agents who investigated and arrested Montes, said she was stoic during her arrest.

"I believe she had planned for that day, if it happened, for 17 years," Lapp told CBS News.

The arrest was humiliating for Montes' family, some of whom worked for the FBI. In a statement, they said she "committed treason" against the U.S. and none of them were aware of her espionage at the time nor supported her position.

	<p>"We continue to disavow what she did and any statements she has made or may make," the family said ahead of her release.</p> <p>Lapp, who is writing <a href="#">a book</a> on Montes, declined to say where she is going after her release "out of respect for the family." But he doesn't expect her to put her newfound freedom in jeopardy by trying to get in contact with the Cubans.</p> <p>"That part of her life is over," Lapp said. "She's done what she's done for them. I can't imagine her risking her liberty."</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Shootings in Albuquerque connected?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.stltoday.com/news/national/crime-and-courts/shootings-in-albuquerque-share-target-elected-democrats/article_7c864f6e-2d47-586e-8f36-e00eb4734516.html">https://www.stltoday.com/news/national/crime-and-courts/shootings-in-albuquerque-share-target-elected-democrats/article_7c864f6e-2d47-586e-8f36-e00eb4734516.html</a>
GIST	<p>ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Bullets flew through one home's front door and garage. At another home, three bullets went into the bedroom of a 10-year-old girl in a series of shootings that had at least one thing in common: They targeted the homes or offices of elected Democratic officials in New Mexico.</p> <p>Nobody was injured in the shootings that are being investigated by local and federal authorities. Albuquerque Police Chief Harold Medina said they're working to determine if the attacks that started in early December and were scattered around the state's largest city are connected.</p> <p>The attacks come amid a sharp rise in threats to members of Congress and two years after supporters of then-President Donald Trump attacked the U.S. Capitol. Local school board members and election workers across the country have also endured harassment, intimidation and threats of violence.</p> <p>Albuquerque officials have acknowledged they don't know what motivated the shootings, but felt it was important to notify the public nonetheless. No suspect has been identified.</p> <p>"We remain committed to finding the individual or individuals responsible," Medina said on social media late Friday.</p> <p>The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives will analyze bullet casings recovered from the scenes to try to determine whether the same weapon was used or if the gun was used in other crimes, said Phoenix-based ATF Special Agent in Charge Brendan Iber.</p> <p>The shootings began Dec. 4 when eight rounds were fired at the home of Bernalillo County Commissioner Adriann Barboa, police said. Seven days later, someone fired more than a dozen shots at former Bernalillo County Commissioner Debbie O'Malley's home.</p> <p>Albuquerque police said technology that can detect the sound of gunfire indicated shots fired in the vicinity of New Mexico Attorney General Raul Torrez's former campaign office on Dec. 10. Nobody was in the building at the time, and police found no damage.</p> <p>Just this week, multiple shots were fired at the home of state Sen. Linda Lopez — a lead sponsor of a 2021 bill that reversed New Mexico's ban on most abortion procedures — and the office of state Sen. Moe Maestas. Maestas, an attorney who co-sponsored a bill last year to set new criminal penalties for threatening state and local judges. It didn't pass.</p> <p>Maestas said employees at his law office heard loud, rapid-fire shots just outside on Thursday and called 911.</p> <p>"I don't think it's anything we did or said, but just the fact that we're elected officials," Maestas said. "Hopefully they (law enforcement) can get a semblance of a motive."</p>

O'Malley and her husband were asleep when the gunfire struck the adobe wall surrounding their home, she said in an email.

"To say I am angry about this attack on my home — on my family, is the least of it," she said. "I remember thinking how grateful I was that my grandchildren were not spending the night, and that those bullets did not go through my house."

Lopez said in a statement that three of the bullets shot at her home passed through her 10-year-old daughter's bedroom. Other bullets penetrated a garage door and damaged a wall.

She called on the public to provide any information that will lead to an arrest, as did Republican leaders in the New Mexico Senate.

Barboa told Albuquerque TV station KRQE that having bullets shot directly through her front door is traumatizing, especially as families prepare to gather for the holidays.

"No one deserves threatening and dangerous attacks like this," she said.

The shootings come as Albuquerque struggles to curb violent crime and address consecutive years of record-setting homicides.

Federal officials also have warned nationally about the potential for violence and attacks on government officials and buildings, and the Department of Homeland Security has said domestic extremism remains a top terrorism threat in the U.S.

In October, an assailant looking for then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi broke into her San Francisco home and used a hammer to attack her husband. Rioters who swarmed the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, and halted the certification of President Joe Biden's electoral victory roamed the halls and shouted menacingly, demanding "Where's Nancy?"

Members of a paramilitary group were convicted of plotting to kidnap Michigan's governor. And in August, a gunman opened fire on an FBI office in Ohio after posting online that federal agents should be killed "on sight" after the FBI searched Trump's Mar-a-Lago home.

Across the U.S., election workers, judges, school board officials and other politicians have been harassed and hounded, sending some into hiding.

In June, a man who was arrested outside Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh's home in Maryland said he was there to kill the justice after a leaked court opinion suggested the court was likely to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark 1973 ruling establishing a nationwide right to abortion.

New Mexico Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver, a Democrat, went into hiding for several weeks in December 2020 and January 2021 in response to online threats.

In 2020, then-Democratic New Mexico state Sen. Jacob Candelaria fled home after receiving anonymous, threatening telephone messages following his criticism of a protest outside the state Capitol against COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

Maestas' bill to protect judges documented 15 threats against judges and courthouses in 2021, as well as a barrage of threats that shut down a courthouse in northern New Mexico in 2018. The judge who was overseeing a case involving the mysterious death of a child at a remote family compound, retired following those threats.

[Return to Top](#)

**HEADLINE** 01/07 Virginia school shooter is a 6yr-old boy

SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/virginia-mayor-teacher-shot-by-6-year-old-improving-gun-violence-gun-control-newport-news-child-richneck-elementary-red-flag-legal-system-crime-punishment-school-shooting#">https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/virginia-mayor-teacher-shot-by-6-year-old-improving-gun-violence-gun-control-newport-news-child-richneck-elementary-red-flag-legal-system-crime-punishment-school-shooting#</a>
GIST	<p>RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — A Virginia teacher who was critically injured when she was <a href="#">shot by a 6-year-old student</a> in Newport News is showing signs of improvement as authorities struggle to understand how a child so young could be involved in a school shooting, the city's mayor said Saturday.</p> <p>Newport News Mayor Phillip Jones said the condition of the teacher, a woman in her 30s, is "trending in a positive direction" as she remains hospitalized.</p> <p>The boy shot and wounded the teacher in a first-grade classroom on Friday at Richneck Elementary School, according to authorities. Police Chief Steve Drew said the shooting was not accidental and was part of an altercation but didn't elaborate further. No students were injured.</p> <p>Jones declined to release additional details Saturday about what led to the altercation, citing the ongoing police investigation. He also would not comment on how the boy got access to the gun or who owns the weapon.</p> <p>"This is a red flag for the country," Jones said.</p> <p>Experts who study gun violence said the shooting represents an extremely rare occurrence of a young child bringing a gun into school and wounding a teacher.</p> <p>"It's very rare and it's not something the legal system is really designed or positioned to deal with," said researcher David Riedman, founder of a database that tracks U.S. school shootings dating back to 1970.</p> <p><b><i>He said Saturday that he's only aware of three other shootings caused by 6-year-old students in the time period he's studied. Those include the fatal shooting of a fellow student in 2000 in Michigan and shootings that injured other students in 2011 in Texas and 2021 in Mississippi.</i></b></p> <p>Riedman said he only knows of one other instance of a student younger than that causing gunfire at a school, in which a 5-year-old student brought a gun to a Tennessee school in 2013 and accidentally discharged it. No one was injured in that case.</p> <p>Daniel W. Webster, a professor at Johns Hopkins University who studies gun violence, agreed that a 6-year-old shooting a teacher at school is extremely unusual. But he said his research shows that instances of young children accessing loaded guns and shooting themselves or others unintentionally in homes or other settings are rising.</p> <p><b><i>A 6 year old gaining access to a loaded gun and shooting him/herself or someone else, sadly, is not so rare," he said in an email.</i></b></p> <p>In the Newport News case, Police Chief Steve Drew said Friday that the shooting didn't appear to be an accident and that it was isolated to the single victim. He said the student and teacher had known each other in a classroom setting.</p> <p>"We did not have a situation where someone was going around the school shooting," Drew told reporters. He said the boy had a handgun in the classroom, and investigators were trying to figure out where he obtained it.</p> <p>Parents and students were reunited at a gymnasium, Newport News Public Schools said via Facebook. The police chief declined to discuss what contact investigators have had with the boy's parents.</p> <p><b><i>We have been in contact with our commonwealth's attorney (local prosecutor) and some other entities to help us best get services to this young man," Drew said.</i></b></p>

	<p>Newport News is a city of about 185,000 people in southeastern Virginia known for its shipyard, which builds the nation's aircraft carriers and other U.S. Navy vessels.</p> <p>Richneck has about 550 students who are in kindergarten through fifth grade, according to the Virginia Department of Education's website. School officials have already said that there will be no classes at the school on Monday.</p> <p><i>Today our students got a lesson in gun violence," said George Parker III, Newport News schools superintendent, "and what guns can do to disrupt, not only an educational environment, but also a family, a community.</i></p> <p>Virginia law does not allow 6-year-olds to be tried as adults.</p> <p>In addition, a 6-year-old is too young to be committed to the custody of the Department of Juvenile Justice if found guilty.</p> <p>A juvenile judge would have authority, though, to revoke a parent's custody and place a child under the purview of the Department of Social Services.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Cross-country pot trafficking operation in WA</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/new-york-man-convicted-cross-country-marijuana-weed-pot-trafficking-operation-western-washington-seattle-us-district-court-doj-oregon-illegal-grow-house-operations#">https://komonews.com/news/local/new-york-man-convicted-cross-country-marijuana-weed-pot-trafficking-operation-western-washington-seattle-us-district-court-doj-oregon-illegal-grow-house-operations#</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE, Wash. — A 54-year-old New York man <a href="#">connected to a trafficking operation</a> based in western Washington was convicted in U.S. District Court in Seattle for conspiracy to distribute more than 1,000 kilos of marijuana, according to U.S. Attorney Nick Brown.</p> <p>The man, Chee Choong Ng, was arrested in 2020 in connection to a coast-to-coast illegal marijuana trafficking operation. The trial lasted two days, and the judge scheduled sentencing for April 4, 2023.</p> <p>The investigation concluded in October 2020 with the search of more than 35 locations in Washington, Oregon, and New York. Many of which were the home of illegal marijuana grow houses.</p> <p>“This type of organized crime has a negative impact on the safety and the quality of life in our local neighborhoods,” said King County Sheriff Mitzi G. Johanknecht in a statement. “It cannot be tolerated.”</p> <p>During the investigation, law enforcement found that marijuana was being grown and shipped to New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Illinois, Kentucky, Georgia, and Missouri.</p> <p>Ng acted as a distributor on the east coast, picking up large shipments of marijuana that had been shipped from west coast members of the conspiracy. Ng would then collaborate with co-conspirators to further distribute the marijuana, according to a news release from the Department of Justice (DOJ).</p> <p>“Illegal grow operations such as these, with their extensive networks, have a wide reaching and destructive impact to the communities they inhabit,” said Inspector in Charge Anthony Galetti.</p> <p>Hundreds of messages sent using the social media app “WeChat”— show that Ng and another co-conspirator were knowingly involved in the conspiracy.</p> <p>When arrested, Ng had five different cell phones and a fake license that he attempted to use after he was stopped with a load of marijuana in the summer of 2020.</p> <p>Prosecutors also found through financial records that Ng had accepted more than \$140,000 in cash throughout the conspiracy.</p>



	<p><a href="#">The other defendants in the case</a> have pleaded guilty and have been sentenced to prison for up to 60 months. This case is part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) investigation.</p> <p>The case was also investigated by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) Seattle and Newark offices and the King County Sheriff's Office, in collaboration with Internal Revenue.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Moonlighting deputy charged in retail theft</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/snohomish-county-deputy-organized-retail-theft/281-11d25e68-bb1b-433e-833b-b24157a92b04">https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/snohomish-county-deputy-organized-retail-theft/281-11d25e68-bb1b-433e-833b-b24157a92b04</a>
GIST	<p>SNOHOMISH COUNTY, Wash. — A now-former Snohomish County deputy is charged with <a href="#">organized retail theft</a> after allegedly stealing from a south Everett Home Depot over the course of several weeks, last summer.</p> <p>Jeremie Zeller, 46, of Lake Stevens was moonlighting as a security guard at the store at the time.</p> <p>He is accused of collecting various items from around the store and placing them at the front where he told co-workers he would pay for them before he left.</p> <p>Prosecutors say surveillance video shows him walking out of the store "on eight occasions" without doing so.</p> <p>When a fellow deputy was called to look at the video, Zeller was immediately recognized, according to the court documents.</p> <p>The total cost of the merchandise was around \$1,000 which makes it a Class B felony, according to state law.</p> <p>"Currently, anything over \$750 is considered Theft 2. Nowadays, with the price of things, it does not take a lot to get to that threshold," said Det. Brad Reorda who investigates retail theft for Lynnwood Police.</p> <p>When people think of organized retail theft they often picture groups of people stealing large amounts of merchandise and selling it online or on the black market overseas.</p> <p>"It's bigger than just addicts. It's bigger than the homeless population," said Reorda. "It's their job. It's how they make a living."</p> <p>Lynnwood has arrested at least 22 thieves since October.</p> <p>In the deputy's case, Zeller "expressed confusion" over being hit with a felony organized retail theft charge because he had "never taken more than \$750 at a time," according to court documents.</p> <p>But Det. Reorda says that's not the way it works.</p> <p>"You might hit a certain retailer every Wednesday. If we can show that pattern, and come up with a total of so many days, we can use that value to charge you with theft."</p> <p>Reorda emphasizes you don't have to be part of an organized ring to be considered organized crime.</p> <p>"That's the message we want to get out," he says. "We do take this seriously, and I do think we will see a trend of thefts going down."</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Seattle PD: 2<sup>nd</sup> road-rage shooting in a week</b>
----------	--

SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/seattle-police-report-second-road-rage-shooting-in-just-over-a-week/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/seattle-police-report-second-road-rage-shooting-in-just-over-a-week/</a>
GIST	<p>A person was wounded in a road-rage shooting in the Pinehurst neighborhood around 4 p.m. Friday, according to Seattle police.</p> <p>The male victim was found, injured in his chest area, near Northeast 125th Street and 10th Avenue East, according to police. His injury was not considered life-threatening. He was taken to UW Medical Center – Northwest.</p> <p>According to police, the victim reported to officers that he and a friend were driving when a vehicle sped up beside them, and a shot was fired. The vehicle left the scene.</p> <p>The alleged shooter was taken into custody elsewhere, according to police, and booked into King County Jail for investigation of assault and drive-by shooting.</p> <p>The male suspect, according to police, told them he had felt threatened by the occupants of the vehicle, so he shot at it and left the area.</p> <p>This is the second time in a week Seattle police are reporting that a road-rage incident has left someone wounded.</p> <p>On Dec. 31, a man was injured in what Seattle police said was a road-rage shooting near the Riverview neighborhood.</p> <p>In that case, police responded at 2:39 a.m. near the entrance to the Duwamish River Trail and Highland Park Southwest after someone heard several gunshots, according to police.</p> <p>Officers found a man, shot in the lower back, sitting outside his vehicle. He was treated at Harborview Medical Center and discharged.</p> <p>The suspected shooter fled in a car, according to police.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Seattle's pandemic crime fever breaking?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/seattles-pandemic-crime-fever-may-finally-be-breaking/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/seattles-pandemic-crime-fever-may-finally-be-breaking/</a>
GIST	<p>One of the most disturbing offshoots of the plague years has been the violent crime that rose up and raged in Seattle and many other cities and towns.</p> <p>“It was the largest recorded increase in homicides in United States history,” <a href="#">one criminologist said</a>, about how the social dislocation of the pandemic had triggered an abrupt rise in violence back in 2020.</p> <p>In Seattle, murder shot up 47% in that first year, and then has stayed high, like it's a new normal. By last summer, overall violent crime here reached a 25-year high.</p> <p>Maybe the most dismaying thing about it is that nobody could say why. “Don't have a clue,” one police detective <a href="#">said when asked about the causes</a>.</p> <p>But is this unusual crime fever finally breaking — receding now as mysteriously as it settled in? “Everybody's kind of cautious to say anything,” Adrian Diaz, Seattle's police chief, told me about what appears to be a substantial easing these past few months.</p> <p>“Is this just a lull, finally? Are we about to see another spike? We don't know. But we've definitely seen it tailing off in a significant way over the last few months,” Diaz said.</p>

Crime peaked, we hope, last August. [That month saw a record 11 homicides](#) and the most violent crimes, 554, for one month in city history. Most of these were robberies or felony-level assaults, such as attacks involving a weapon (usually a gun).

Last fall, starting in October, something started to shift. For the fourth quarter of 2022, violent crimes dropped 18% compared to the fourth quarter of 2021. According to [Seattle police records](#), December saw the fewest acts of violence reported in the city going back nearly three years, to March 2020, when the coronavirus first upended everything.

Property crime data isn't as reliable, because so much of it goes unreported, Diaz said. But that too is falling. Total crime in Seattle, after looking like a chart from hell for two years, has [dropped enough in the past few months](#) that it now may be trending back toward pre-pandemic levels.

There's no way to know right now what's going on with these shifts, whether they are unique to Seattle, or whether they'll last, said Jacqueline Helfgott, director of Seattle University's [Crime and Justice Research Center](#). She had proposed an empirical study with Seattle police to explore the root causes of the city's crime surge, but they didn't have the bandwidth for it.

That said, there are theories.

"If you increase temptations and reduce social controls, you'll see an increase in crime," Helfgott said, citing a principle in criminology called "routine activities theory." It holds that crime depends mostly on opportunity and whether there's social "guardianship" around to mitigate it. This could be police, though most often it's simply other people out and about the city.

"Throughout the pandemic there weren't enough people on the street, and also were not enough police," she says. "I think the biggest issue right now that might explain the drop in crime is that we're returning to a semblance of normal. There's more people downtown. There's more people walking around without masks. It just feels more normal."

Helfgott said it's well known that psychological anxiety is linked to crime. In fact, mental health experts with the state Department of Health all but predicted the pandemic would trigger a crime wave. Back in the summer of 2020, they put out a behavioral health resource warning that waves of the virus would likely set off a "trauma cascade," with parts of society becoming disillusioned and "acting out."

"Acting 'out' includes increased aggression, hostility, irritability, substance use and risky behaviors. Because of this, law enforcement may see a disproportionate increase in violent crimes," [the health memo forecast](#), with deadly accuracy.

"Once we hit the pandemic, there was like a switch," Chief Diaz says. "There was more road rage, more robberies and these cases where people were snapping."

Another factor for Seattle was the rise of serious, violent crime related to homeless encampments. Diaz said he joined Seattle police in 1997 and had never seen much of a link between serious crime and homelessness until the pandemic hit.

"The homeless encampments became like these underground markets for violence," Diaz said.

Seattle had allowed encampments to "stay in place" and grow due to pandemic restrictions on shelters. But by the spring of 2022, up to a third of all shootings were related in some way to the camps, Diaz says.

It's possible that Mayor Bruce Harrell's focus on breaking up the camps has contributed to the drop in crime numbers, but again, that hasn't been studied. Diaz said police had seized 1,260 guns through November, in part by focusing more on encampments.

Helfgott also says the drumbeat of stories in the media “giving a sense that it’s a free-for-all out there, that there’s no police and it’s just total lawlessness,” may have fed a pernicious feedback loop of anxiety and social disruption, prompting still more crime.

So hopefully this story, about how crime finally may be easing, will help break that cycle?

Somehow I doubt it. Crime going up is a story that grabs you; crime going down will either be ho-hummed or outright disbelieved, especially by Seattle’s many national critics. It’s also one of the riskier stories one can do in the news business, as the next big shooting or killing, which is certainly coming, will make me look like an idiot.

I’m not predicting any future here; stories about crime trends as a rule look backward. It’s also true that if your store gets robbed or your catalytic converter gets sawed off your car, about the last thing you’ll care about are broad stats showing that things were moving in the right direction back in December.

But Seattle’s been afflicted with a sort of contagion of bad trends. At times the city’s crime itself has seemed like a virus, spreading and injuring countless victims and businesses, all while city leaders in 2020 and 2021 had no coherent plan to “flatten the curve.”

So it’s big news that it’s on the wane now, for whatever reasons. If it holds, it will be about the best prognosis for Seattle’s health our ailing city has gotten in a long, long time.

[Return to Top](#)

**Information From Online Communities and Unclassified Sources/InFOCUS is a situational awareness report published daily by the Washington State Fusion Center.**

**If you no longer wish to receive this report, please submit an email to [intake@wsfc.wa.gov](mailto:intake@wsfc.wa.gov) and enter UNSUBSCRIBE InFOCUS in the Subject line.**

**DISCLAIMER – the articles highlighted within InFOCUS is for informational purposes only and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Washington State Fusion Center, the City of Seattle, the Seattle Police Department or the Washington State Patrol and have been included only for ease of reference and academic purposes.**

**FAIR USE Notice** All rights to these copyrighted items are reserved. Articles and graphics have been placed within for educational and discussion purposes only, in compliance with 'Fair Use' criteria established in Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976. The principle of 'Fair Use' was established as law by Section 107 of The Copyright Act of 1976. 'Fair Use' legally eliminates the need to obtain permission or pay royalties for the use of previously copyrighted materials if the purposes of display include 'criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research.' Section 107 establishes four criteria for determining whether the use of a work in any particular case qualifies as a 'fair use'. A work used does not necessarily have to satisfy all four criteria to qualify as an instance of 'fair use'. Rather, 'fair use' is determined by the overall extent to which the cited work does or does not substantially satisfy the criteria in their totality. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use,' you must obtain permission from the copyright owner. For more information go to: [<http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml)

THIS DOCUMENT MAY CONTAIN COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL. COPYING AND DISSEMINATION IS PROHIBITED WITHOUT PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNERS.

Source: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>

